TANKS ILLUSTRATED No 15

US Halftracks of World War Two

STEVEN J. ZALOGA

1. An M3A1 halftrack armoured personnel carrier of the 10th Armoured Division during the fighting in Germany in April 1945. The most noticeable difference betweeen the M3 and M3A1 was the large machine gun pulpit on the front right-hand corner of the M3A1.

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ARMS AND ARMOUR PRESS
London – Melbourne – Harrisburg, Pa – Cape Town

Published in Great Britain by Arms and Armour Press, Lionel Leventhal Limited, 2–6 Hampstead High Street, London NW3 1QQ. 11 Munro Street, Port Melbourne 3207. Australia. Cameron & Kelker Streets, P.O. Box 1831, Harrisburg, Pa., U.S.A. Sanso Centre, 8 Adderley Street, P.O. Box 94, Cape Town 8000, South Africa.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data:
Zaloga, Steven J.
US Halftracks of World War Two – (Tanks illustrated; 15)
1. United States, *Army, Infantry* – History
2. Armoured Vehicles, Military – United States – History
I. Title II. Series
623.74'75'0973 UG446.5
ISBN 0-85368-697-1

Editing, design and artwork by Roger Chesneau.
Printed in Italy
by Tipolitografia G. Canale & C. S.p.A. - Turin
in association with Keats European Ltd.

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2. The M15A1 and M16 were the only halftrack types still in widespread US Army service at the time of the Korean War in 1950; here, an M15A1 is being operated by the 25th Division in July of that year.

Introduction

Although the tank was the focus of attention during the era of blitzkrieg warfare in Europe in 1939–45, it was often its more prosaic stablemate, the armoured infantry transporter, that bore the brunt of the fighting. Indeed two armies relied on halftracked transporters to mechanize their armoured infantry units, the German army with its SdKfz 251 and the United States Army with its M2 and M3 halftracks.

The American halftrack was a jack-of-all-trades. It was used not only as an infantry transporter, but also as a scout vehicle, as an artillery tractor and as a command-and-communications vehicle. Furthermore, it provided the basic chassis for a wide range of tank destroyers, self-propelled artillery mounts and anti-aircraft and other special-purpose vehicles.

There were two basic types of halftracks, in two families: the M2 and M9 were officially classified as Halftrack Armoured Cars, and were employed as scout, tractor and command vehicles; and the M3 and M5 were officially designated Halftrack Personnel Carriers, had more internal seating than the M2 and M9, and were the primary troop transporter types. The M2 and M3 were automotively related and used petrol engines, whereas the M5 and M9 were diesel powered versions that were manufactured primarily for Lend-Lease, not for use by the US Army. These halftracks in all their variations were perhaps the most common types of armoured vehicle of the Second World War, and over 53,000 were manufactured. There were four basic families of halftrack-derived vehicles, and these comprised the Gun Motor Carriage (GMC, or tank destroyer), the Howitzer Motor Carriage (HMC), the Multiple Gun Motor Carriage (MGMC, or anti-aircraft vehicle) and the Mortar Motor Carriage (MMC).

The aim of this book is to provide a pictorial sample of the wide range of halftrack types used by the US Army during the Second World War, with the focus on the versions which actually saw combat service. Special attention has been directed towards providing close-up details of the interiors of these vehicles for the benefit of modellers and vehicle collectors; in many cases, these are the first such details to have been published. Almost all the photos in the book are US Army Signal Corps material from the collections of the National Archives, DAVA, the Patton Museum and other official US Army sources.

Steven Zaloga

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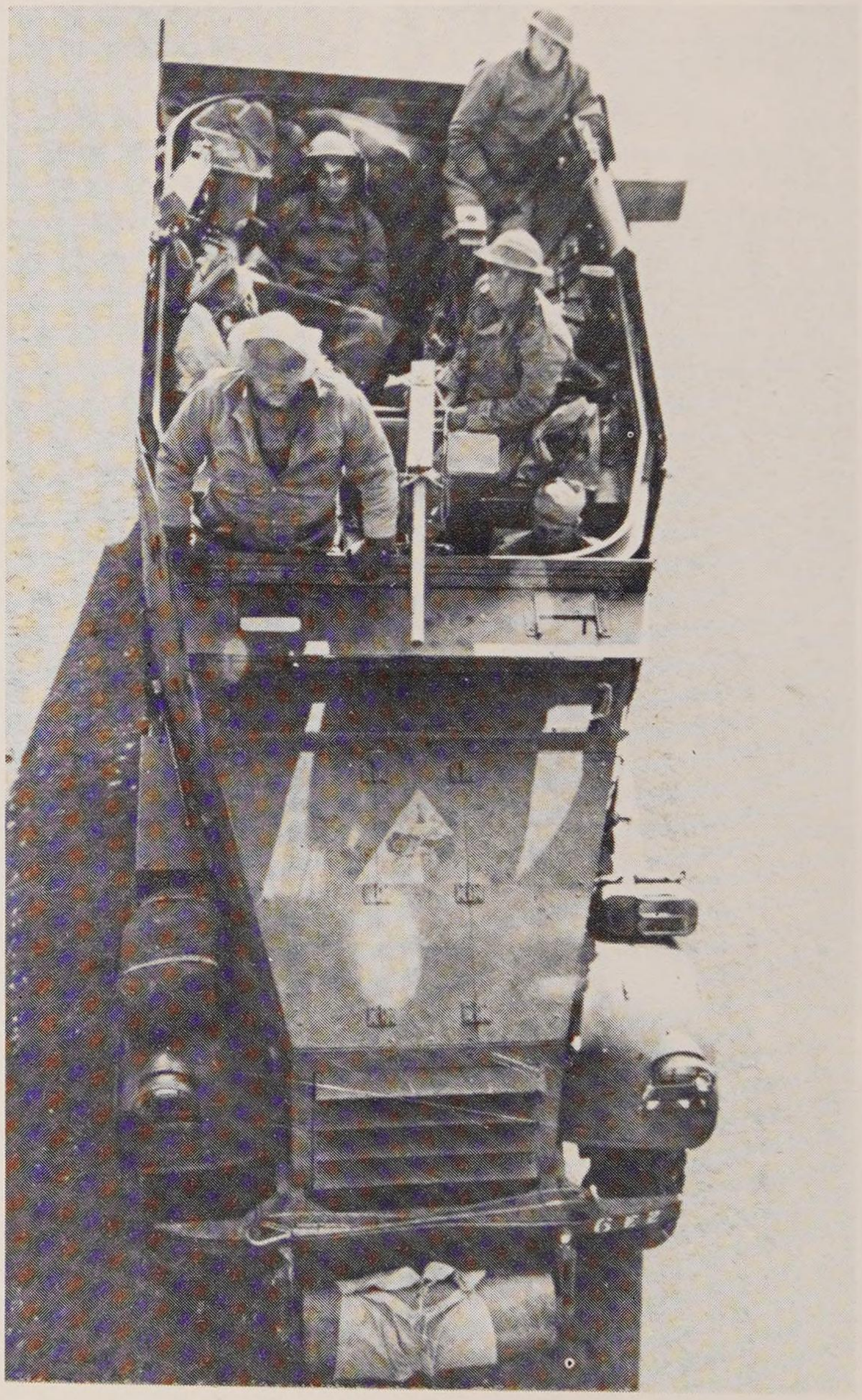

3. An M2 halftrack armoured car of the 6th Infantry Anti-Tank Company in Jefferson, South Carolina, on 5 November 1941, before the outbreak of war; the vehicle is towing a 37mm anti-tank gun. The M2 had a shorter hull than the M3, and had an external stowage door on the hull sides.

4. An interesting overhead shot of an M2 halftrack armoured car of Easy Company, 6th Infantry, 69th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, on 17 November 1941, during prewar manoeuvres. The tricolour insignia of the 1st Armored division is evident on the bonnet. This photograph clearly shows the ring mount around the inside of the hull on which the machine guns were fitted.

5. An M2 halftrack armoured car of the 69th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, during manoeuvres on 20 November 1941. Among the other vehicles seen here are a ¾-ton truck, in the lower left-hand corner; a jeep; an M3 medium tank, behind the half-track; and a pair of M2A1 medium tanks, behind the M3.

6. An M2 halftrack armoured car, showing the tripods for two of the Browning .30 calibre machine guns on the rear. The vehicle belonged to the 6th Infantry Anti-Tank Company during the South Carolina manoeuvres of November 1941.

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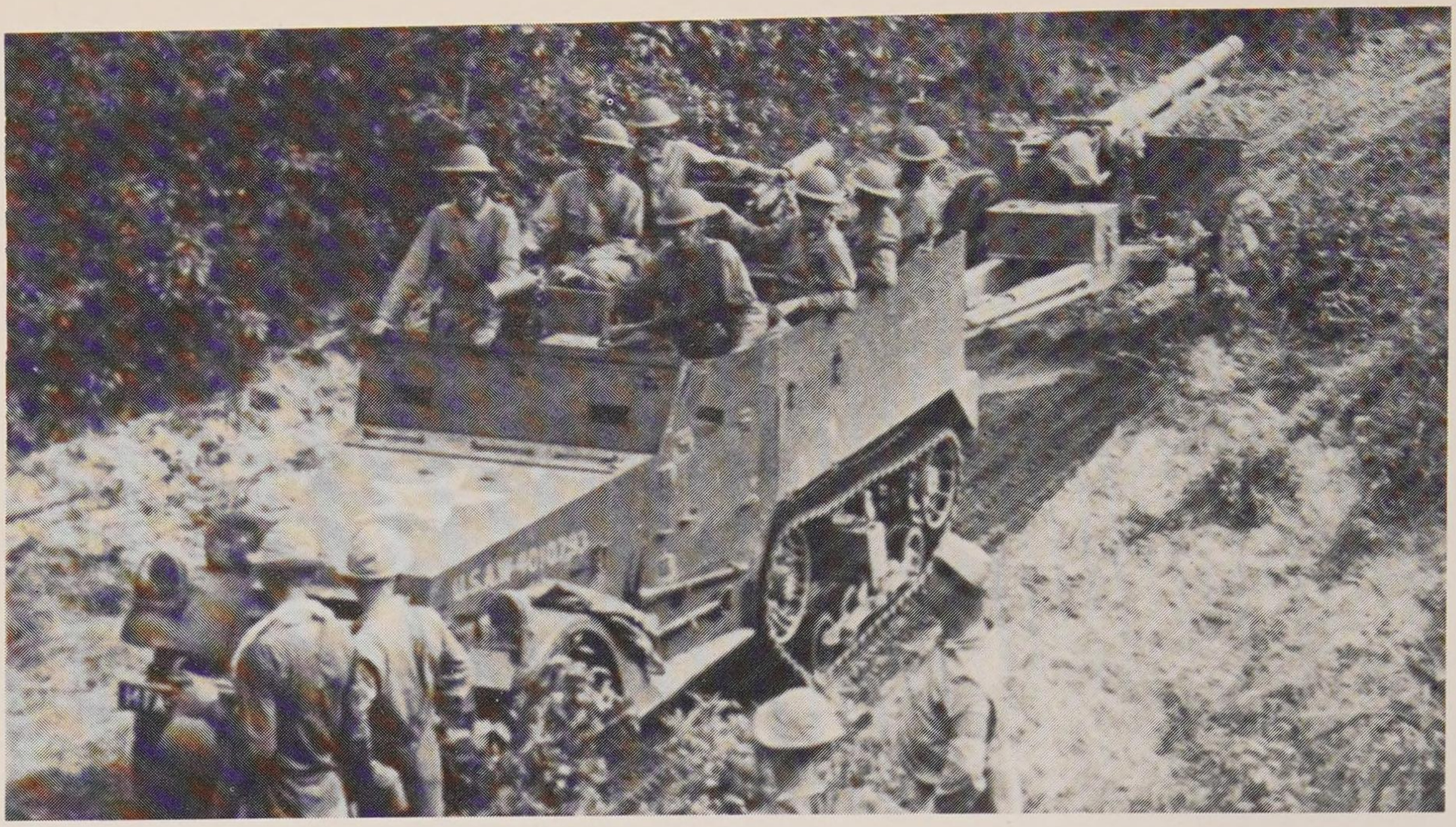

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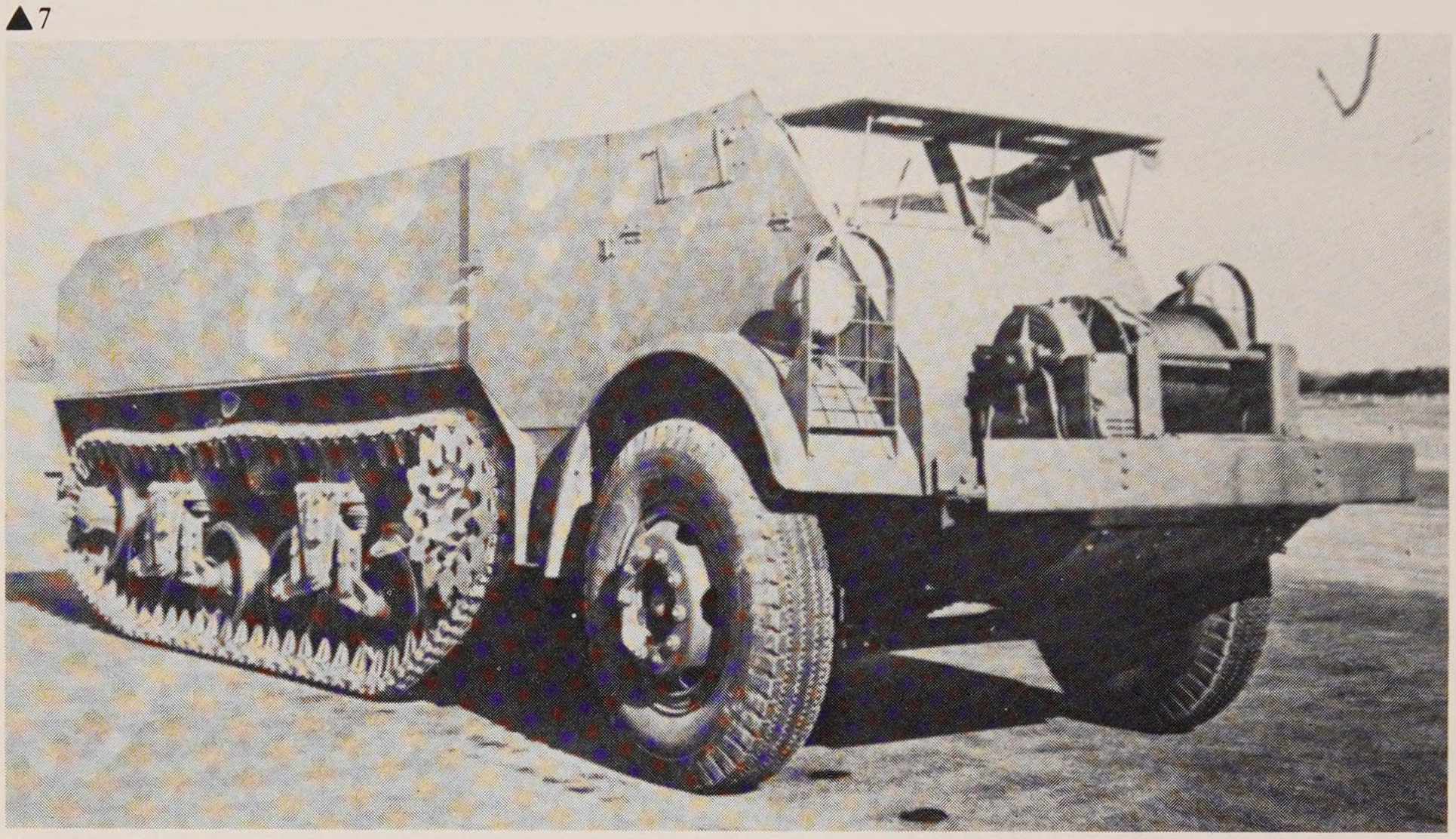

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7. The M2 was the standard artillery tractor of armoured units in the early years of the war, like this vehicle of the 14th Field Artillery in Leesville, Louisiana, towing a 75mm field gun, September 1941. On the hood is the insignia of the 2nd Armored Division, a red roundel with a white star and a blue inner circle, a reverse of the Air Force insignia of the time.

8. One of the little-known competitors to the M3 halftrack was the Mack T-3. It differed from the M3 in having a cab-over-engine configuration,

9. M2 halftracks of the Armored Force Replacement Center at Fort Knox, Kentucky, around the time of the outbreak of war. These halftracks have a powered winch on the front instead of the more common roller.

10. An M3 halftrack passes through Mazagan, Morocco, during Operation 'Torch' in 1942. This vehicle is fitted with a wading tube over its exhaust to permit it to come ashore from a landing craft.

11. An M2 halftrack armoured car of Company D, 2/13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, at Souk el Khemis, Tunisia, being used in its normal role as a scout vehicle.

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12. The crew of an M2 scout halftrack of the 2/13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, at Souk el Khemis, Tunisia, on 26 November 1942, before the Kasserine Pass battle. The crew is wearing a mixture of armoured force and tank destroyer garb.

13. The 1st Armored Division lost many halftracks at Kasserine Pass and some, like these M3s, were subsequently impressed into service with the Afrika Korps.

14. A 15th Armored Engineers M2 halftrack armoured car in Bizerte on 9 May 1943.

15. An M2 halftrack armoured car on patrol near Venafro, Italy, in December 1943. One of the main problems of the M2 was its cramped interior; this led to the attachment of improvized exterior stowage bins on many vehicles.

16. An M3 halftrack armoured personnel carrier in Sicily, 1943. The rack on the hull side was used to carry mines, a practice which soon fell into disfavour since the mines were vulnerable to small-arms fire.

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17. An M2 of the 540th Engineers tows a 57mm anti-tank gun ashore at San Raphael during the invasion of southern France, 15 August 1944. The large number of landmines stowed in improvized racks on the hull side is quite unusual.

18. An M3A1 passes through Cantigny, France, on 31 August 1944 during the Normandy breakout. This vehicle belonged to D Company, 41st Armored Infantry, 2nd Armored Division.

19. An M3 halftrack of an armoured engineer company crosses a pontoon bridge near La Rogue, France, on 31 July 1944. All halftrack personnel carriers had canvas tarpaulins to cover the troop compartment, but these were seldom used in armoured infantry units as they hindered the exit of the crew over the hull side.

20. A squad of 'blitz doughs' from C Company, 61st Armored Infantry, 10th Armored Division, goes into action near Bubenorbois, Germany, on 17 April 1945. This is an M2A1, which was fitted with a pulpit mount like the M3A1 in lieu of the earlier machine gun ring track on the M2.

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21. This M2A1 was displayed to engineer troops of XX Corps in Belgium in January 1945 as an example of the style of camouflage painting that was supposed to be applied during the winter. It employed a lime whitewash, but bands of the basic olive drab summer camouflage were left showing through. This practice was seldom followed in the field!

22. The whitewashed M3A1 halftracks of the 44th Armored Infantry, 6th Armored Division, rendezvous outside Mageret, Belgium, on 20 January 1945 during the Battle of the Bulge. Canvas tarpaulins are fitted over the crew compartments to give some protection from the weather.

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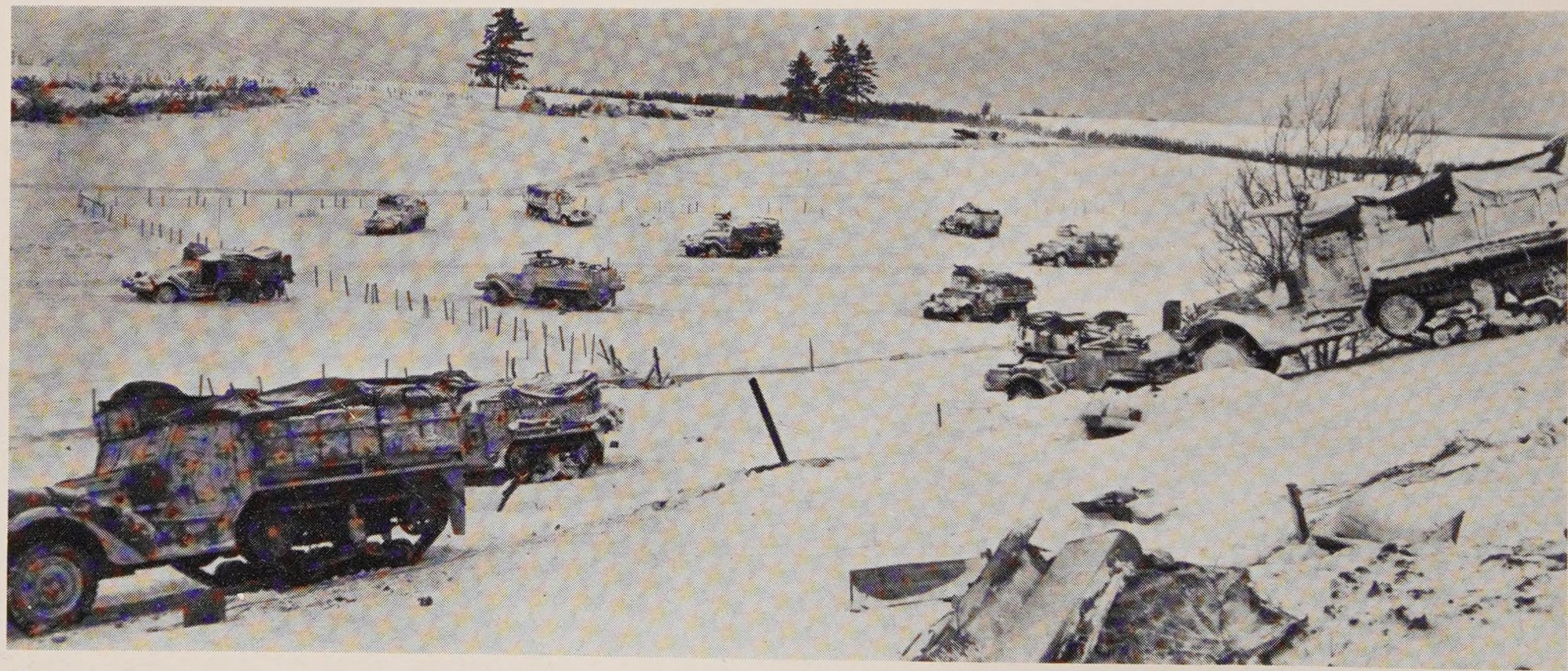

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23. Another view of an M2A1 in sample winter camouflage paint. This photograph also shows details of the .50 calibre machine gun pulpit.

24. M3A1 halftracks and M7 Priest HMCs of the 101st Airborne Division outside Bastogne, Belgium, during the initial attempts to stem the German offensive, 19 December 1945.

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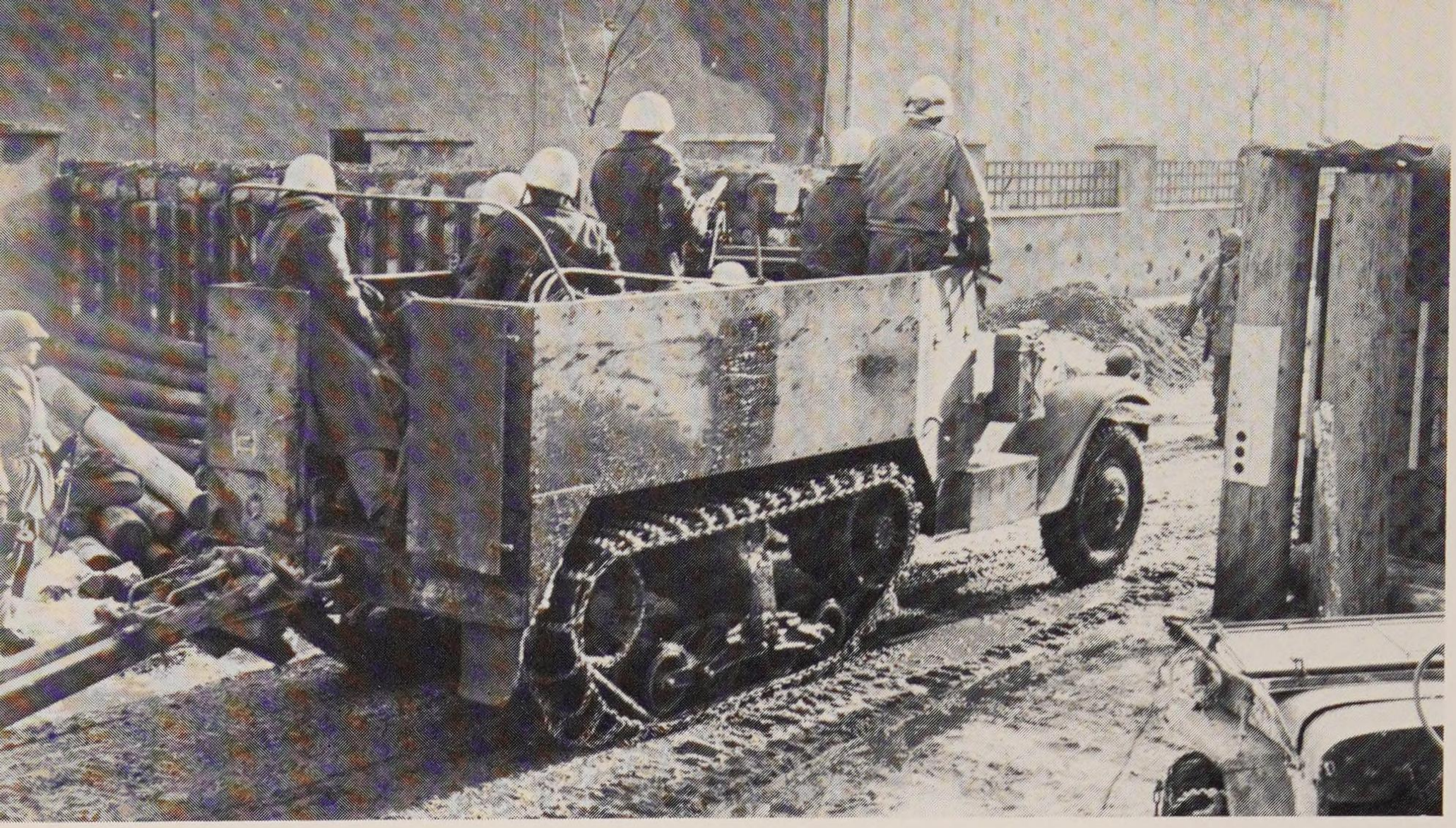

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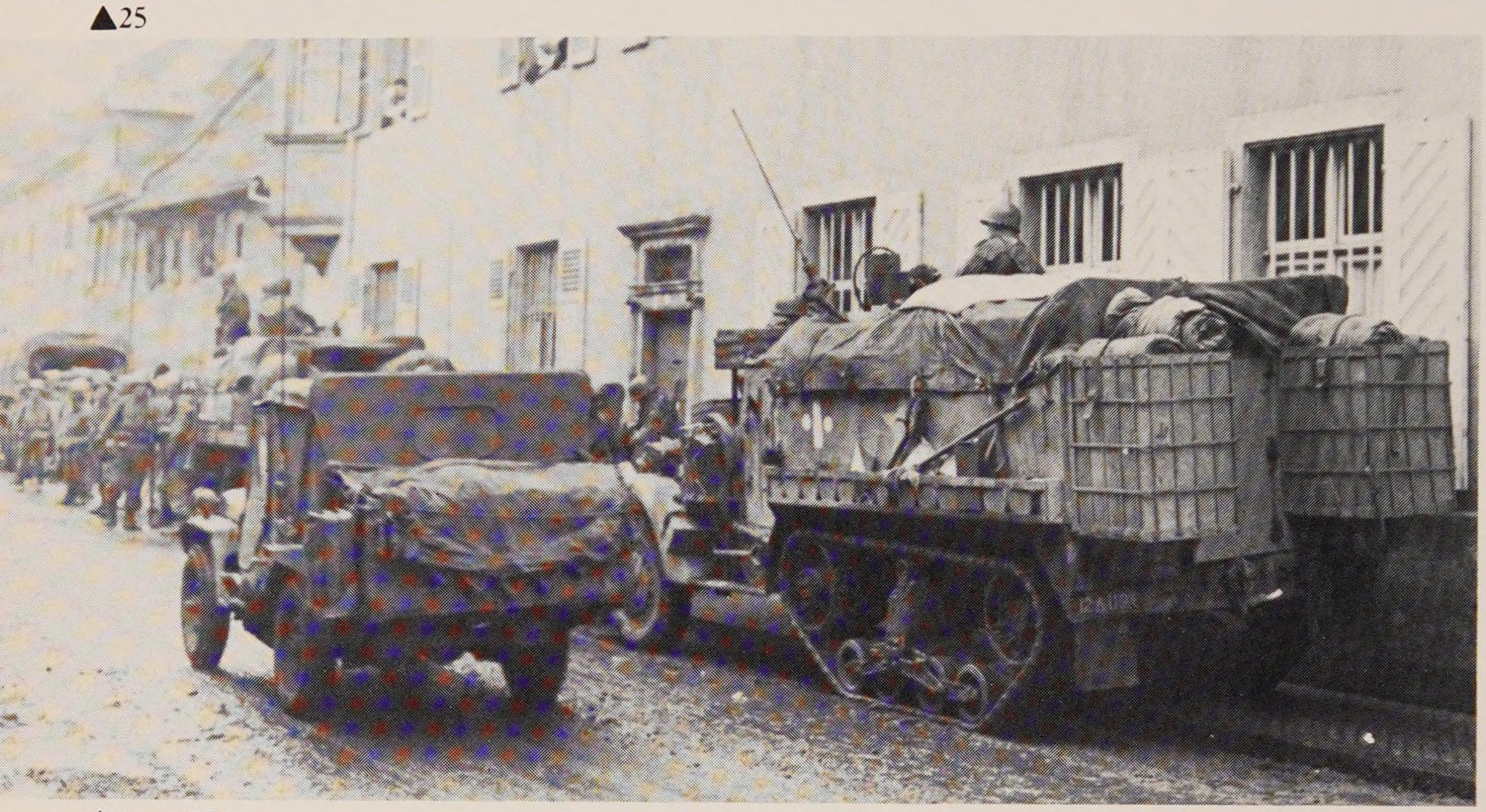

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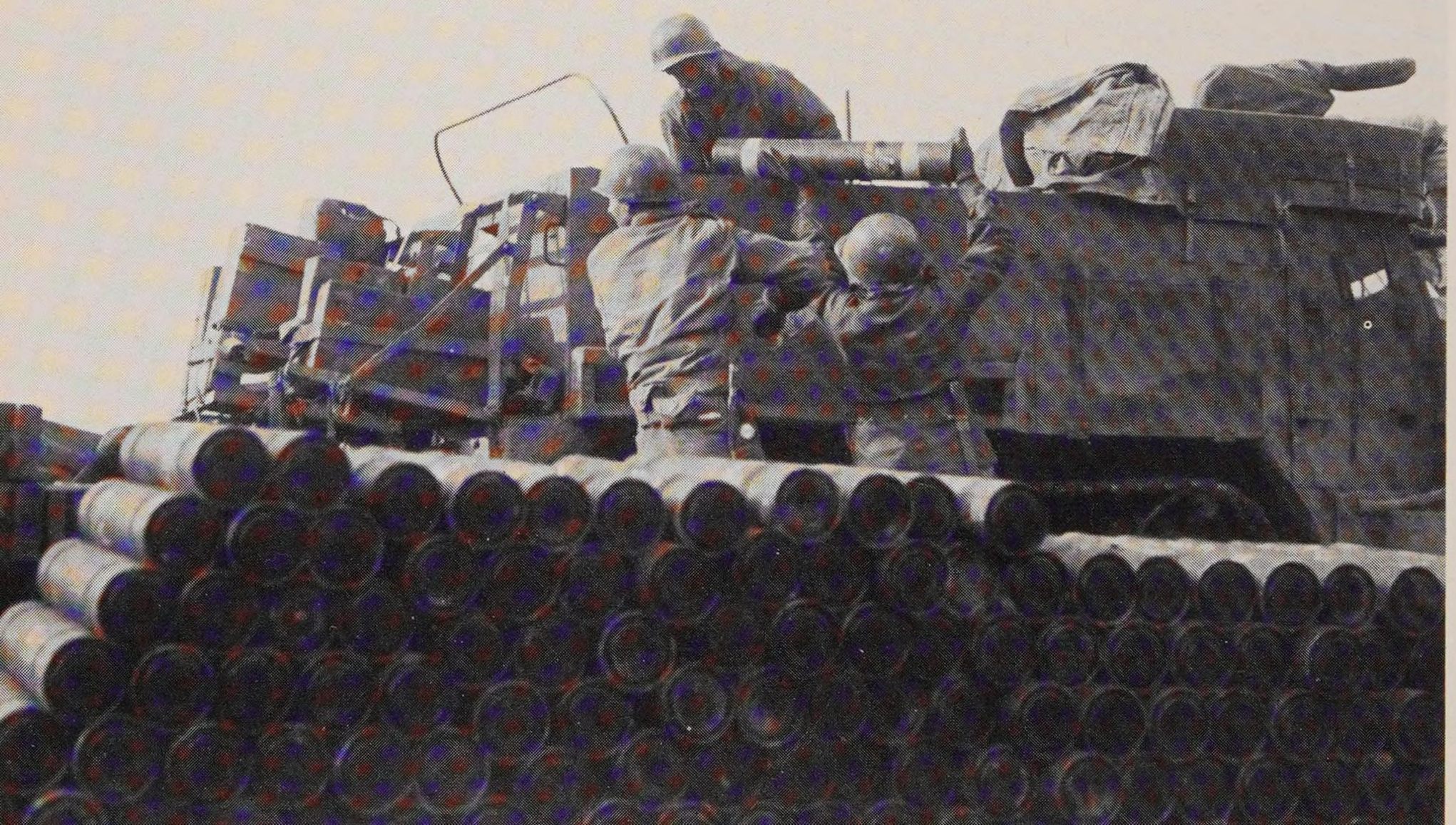

25. An M3 halftrack being used by the 2nd French Armoured Division as an artillery tractor during the fighting for Comar, 2 February 1945.
26. An M3A1 halftrack of the 119th Armored Engineers, 12th Armored Division, during the fighting near the Colmar pocket on 5 February 1945. This vehicle has had a set of stowage bins added at the rear.
27. M2A1s were often used to transport artillery ammunition to forward positions. Here, supplies for the 276th Field Artillery are loaded near Baustert, Germany, on 25 February 1945.
28. The town crier of Anrochte, Germany, reads the new military occupation laws to the residents of the town from an M3A1 halftrack of the 8th Armored Division on 5 April 1945.
29. The Marine Corps did not use halftracks as extensively as the Army, preferring the amphibious amtracs like the LVT-2 and LVT-3 instead. This is a rare example of a Marine halftrack, being used here as a communications vehicle on the Marshall Islands during the fighting in early February 1944.
30. Although the Marines did not use the personnel carrier version of the halftrack extensively in the Pacific, a number of Army units did use it. A pair of M3 halftracks are here being used as utility vehicles by the 640th Tank Destroyer Battalion at Gloucester, New Britain, in May 1944.

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1. An M3 halftrack of the 37th Recon Troop firing at Japanese nipers on Bougainville, 10 March 1944. Halftracks were often used o bring supplies to exposed positions during the Pacific fighting.
2. An M3 halftrack taking part in the fighting on Peleliu Island, Palau, Caroline Islands, in 1944.
3. An M2A1 halftrack armoured car attached to the US 10th Army on Okinawa passes wrecked Japanese bombers on 13 June 1945.
34. Among the other armies using the M3 in the Pacific theatre was the Chinese Army. Here, infantry of the 1st Chinese Regiment, 5332nd Brigade, 1st Tank Group, disembark during training in Kabani, Burma, on 25 January 1945.

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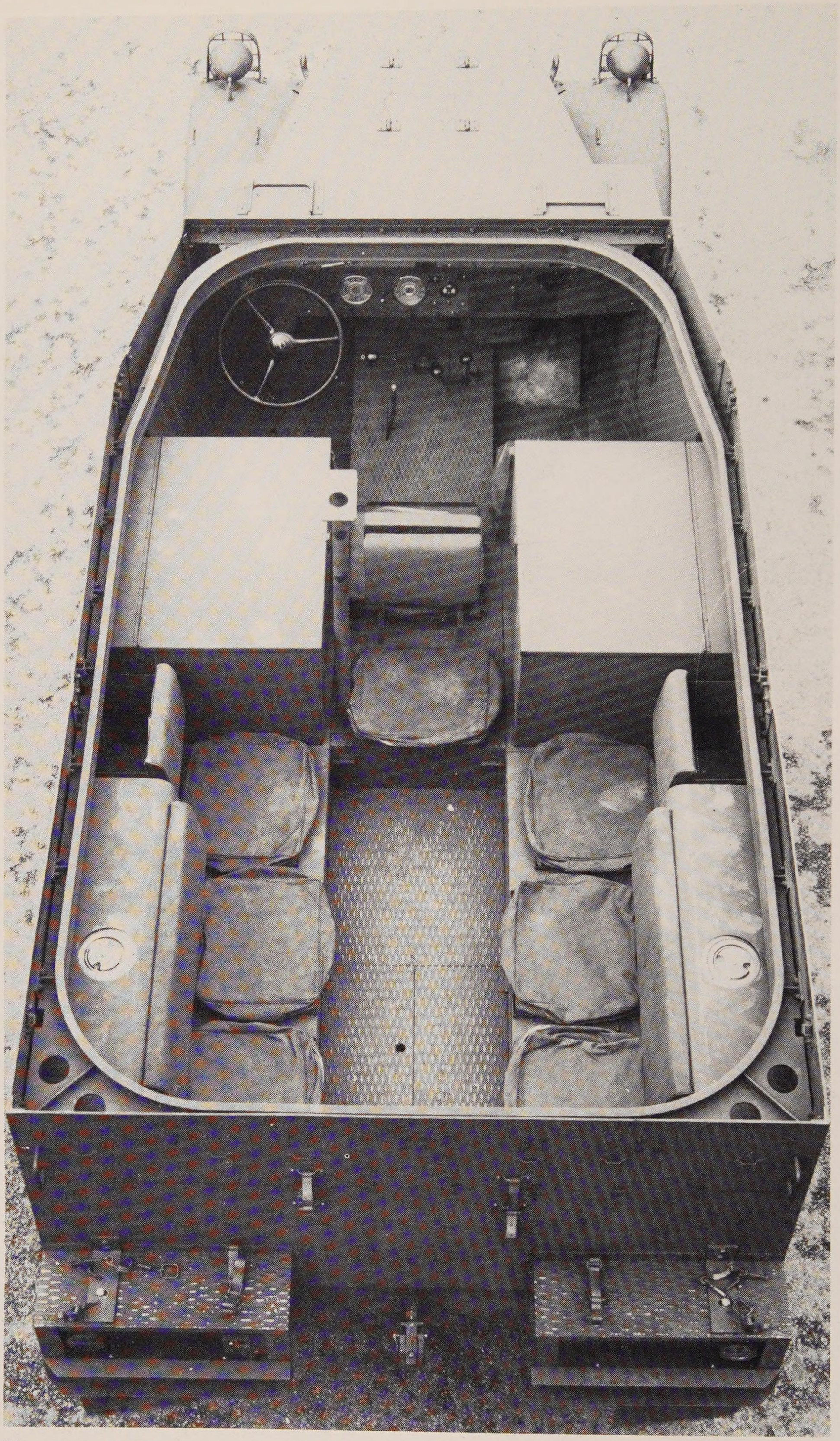

35. This interior view of the M2 halftrack armoured car clearly shows the two large stowage bins that characterized this particular version. These bins could be unloaded via exterior or interior panels.
36. An overhead view of the M3 halftrack personnel carrier. Behind the troop seats were fuel tanks (front) or racks for rifle stowage (rear).
37. An interior view of an M3 halftrack personnel carrier, showing clearly the large pintle mounting in the forward troop compartment; this mounting could carry either a .30 or a .50 calibre machine gun.
38. A front overhead view of an M5 halftrack personnel carrier. The major external difference between the M3 and M5 was the latter's simpler, flat mudguards over the front wheels. The M5 was used by the British Army in the utility role and, in some units, in lieu of the Universal Carrier.
39. A rear overhead photograph of the M5 halftrack personnel carrier. As is evident in this view, the interior of the M5 was fitted out like that of the M3.
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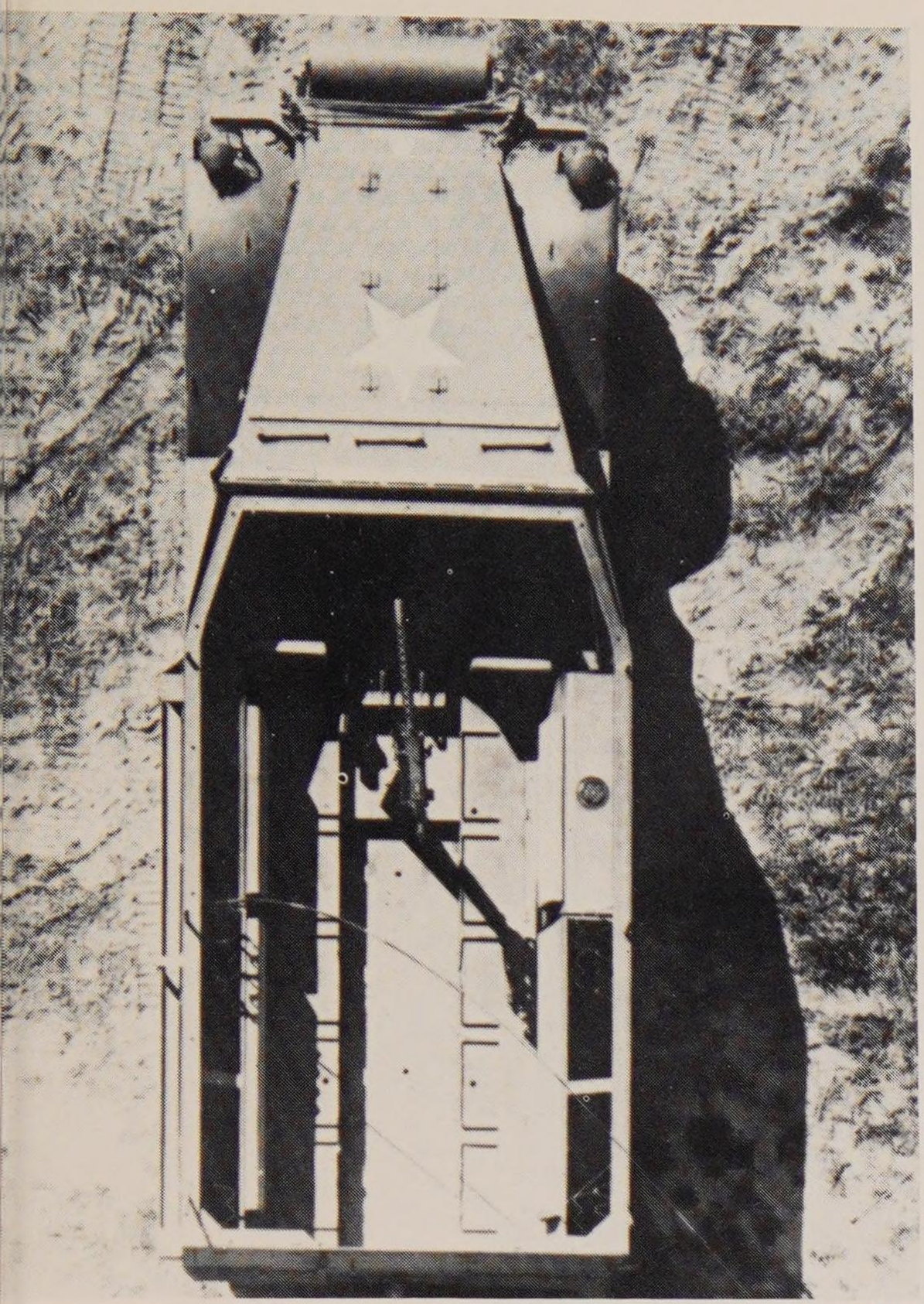

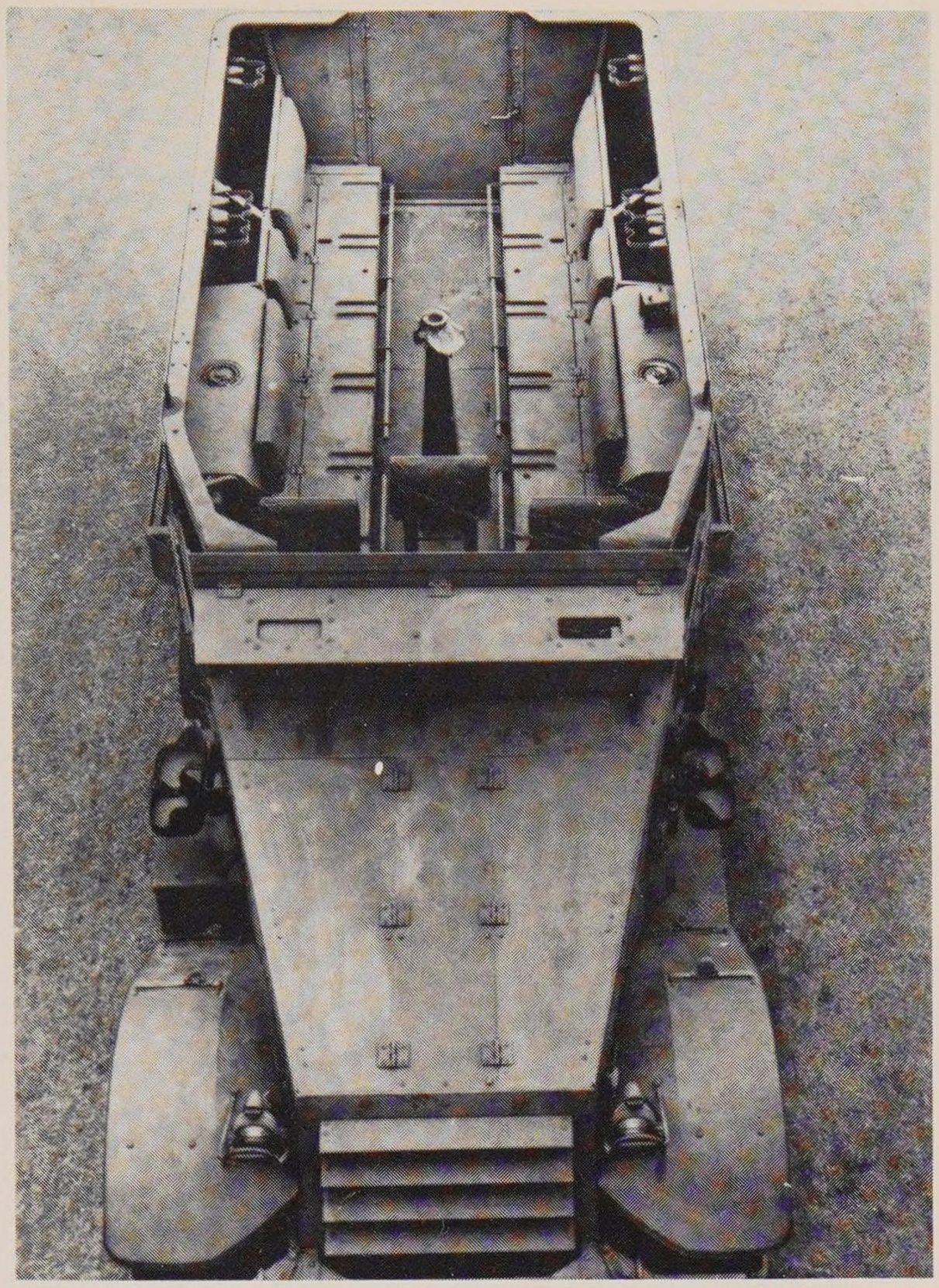

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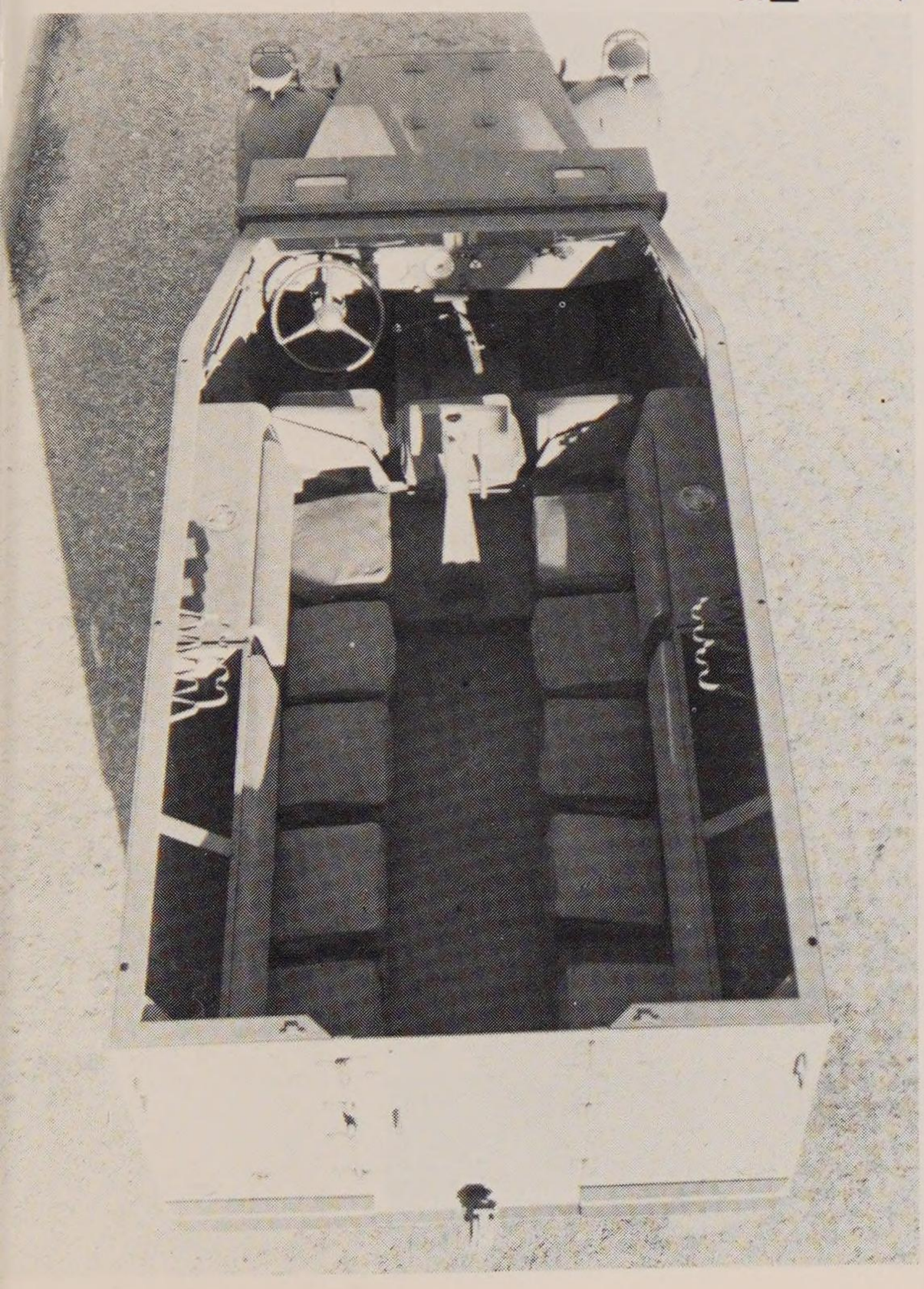

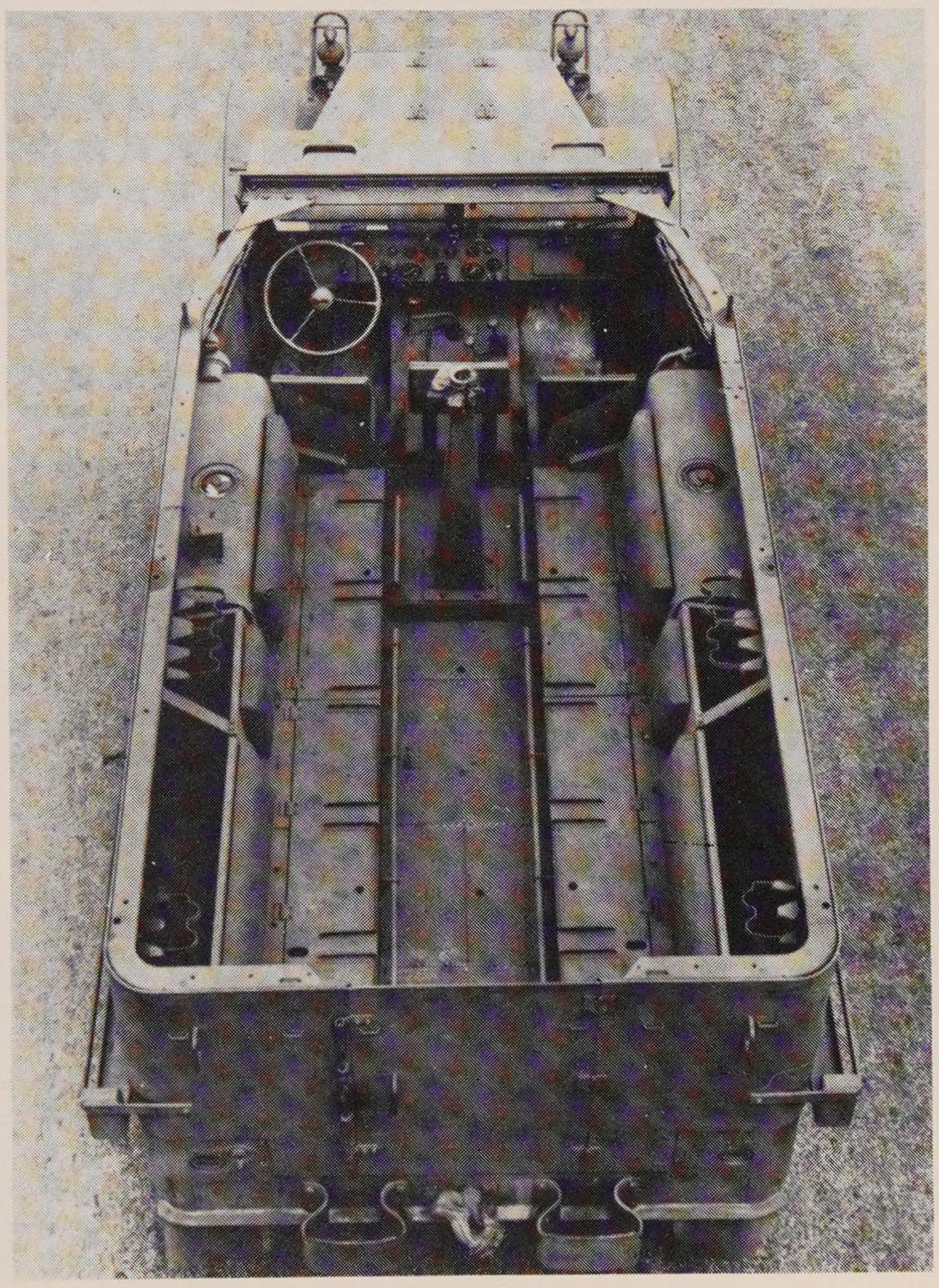

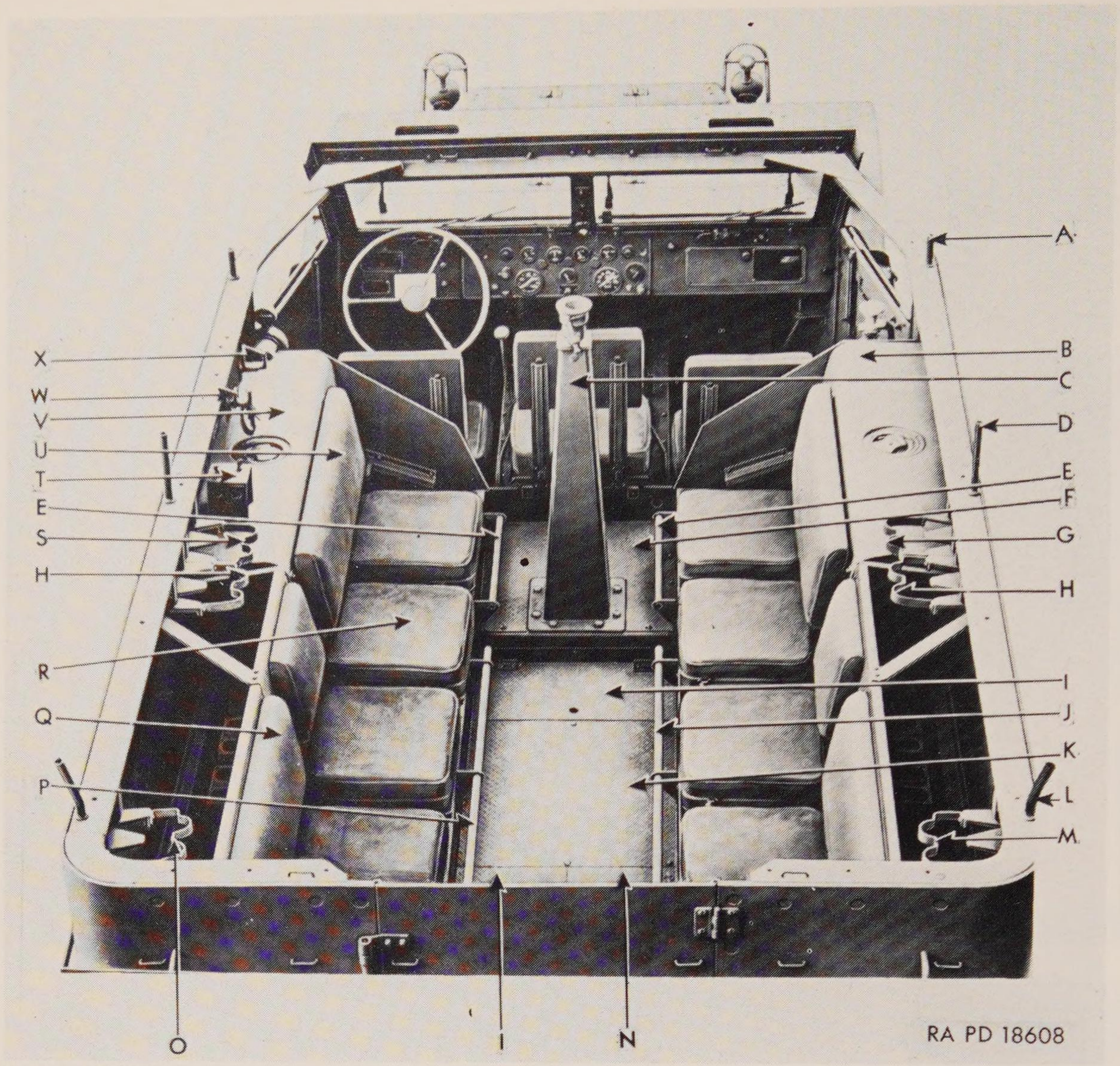

40. An interior view of the M9 halftrack armoured car. The M9 differed from the M2 in being fitted with a diesel engine, but the two vehicles were similar internally. Externally, the M9 used a flat front mudguard like the M5, rather than the rounded automotive style used on the M2 and M3 halftracks.

41. Further details of the internal stowage of the M5 halftrack personnel carrier.

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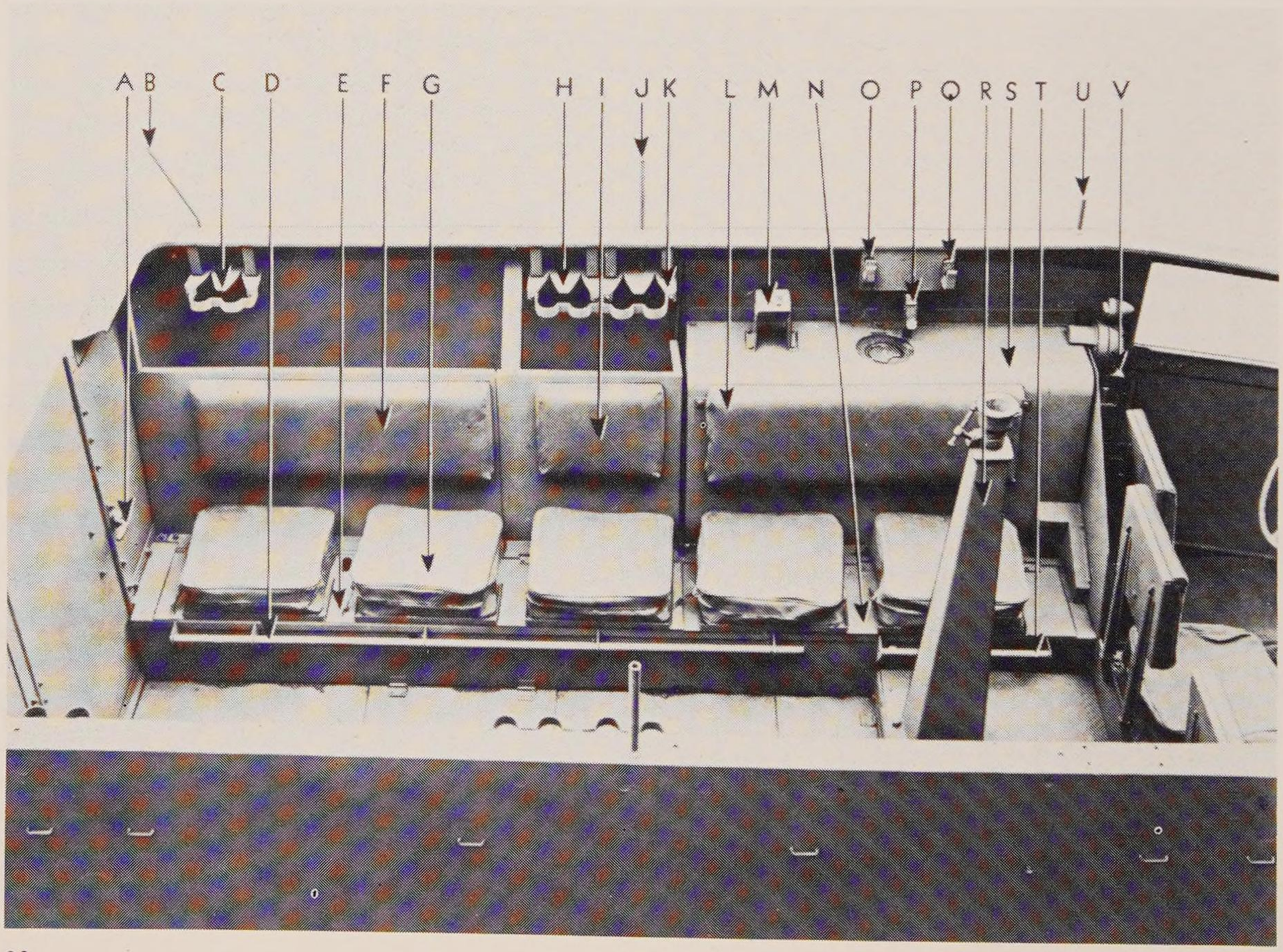
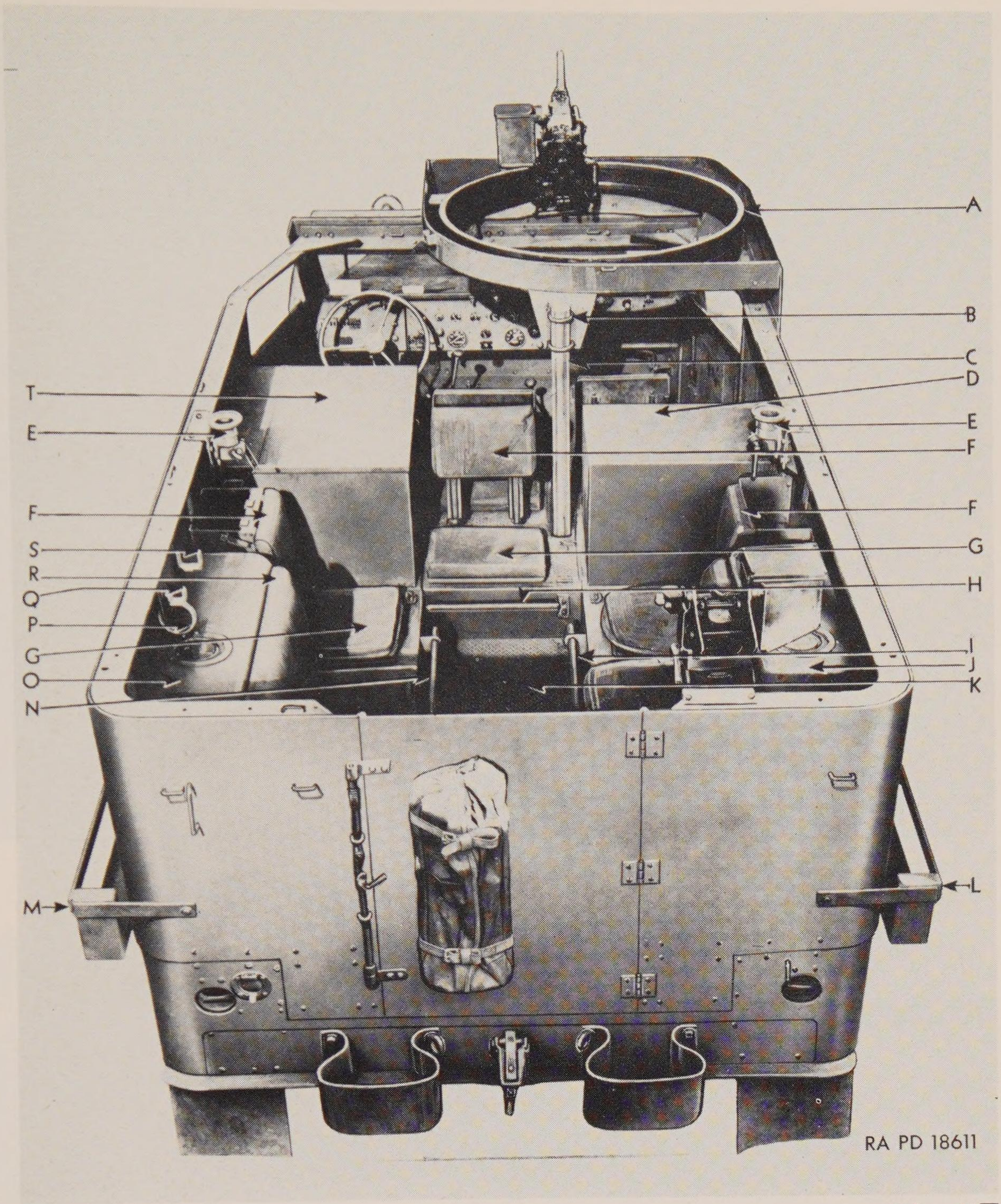
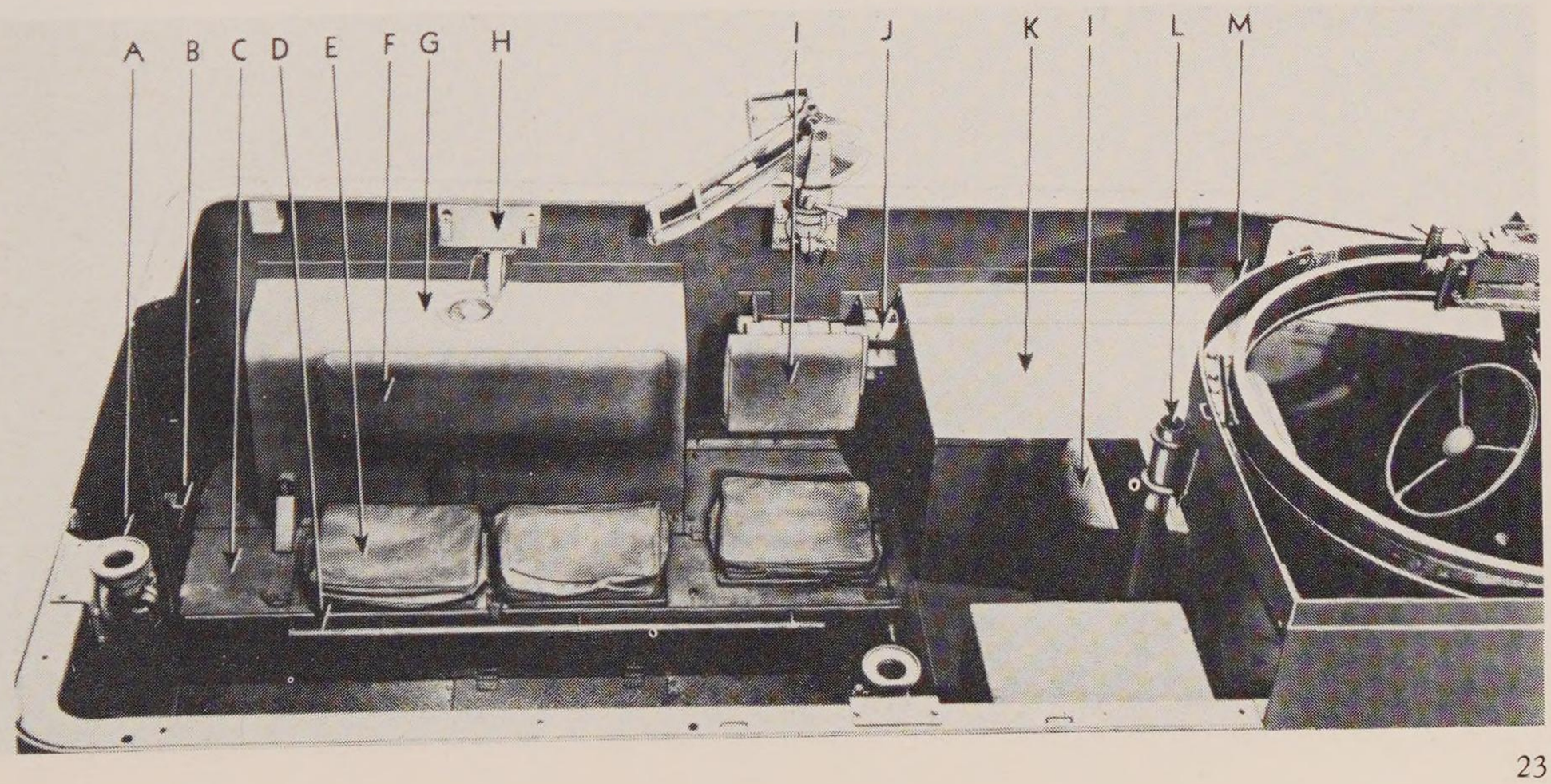


. The M9A1 halftrack moured car had a pul- t mount added for the achine gun instead of e internal pintle mount the M9.

. Further details of e interior of the M9A1 lftrack armoured car, hich correspond to ose of the petrol- riven M2A1 halftrack rmoured car.





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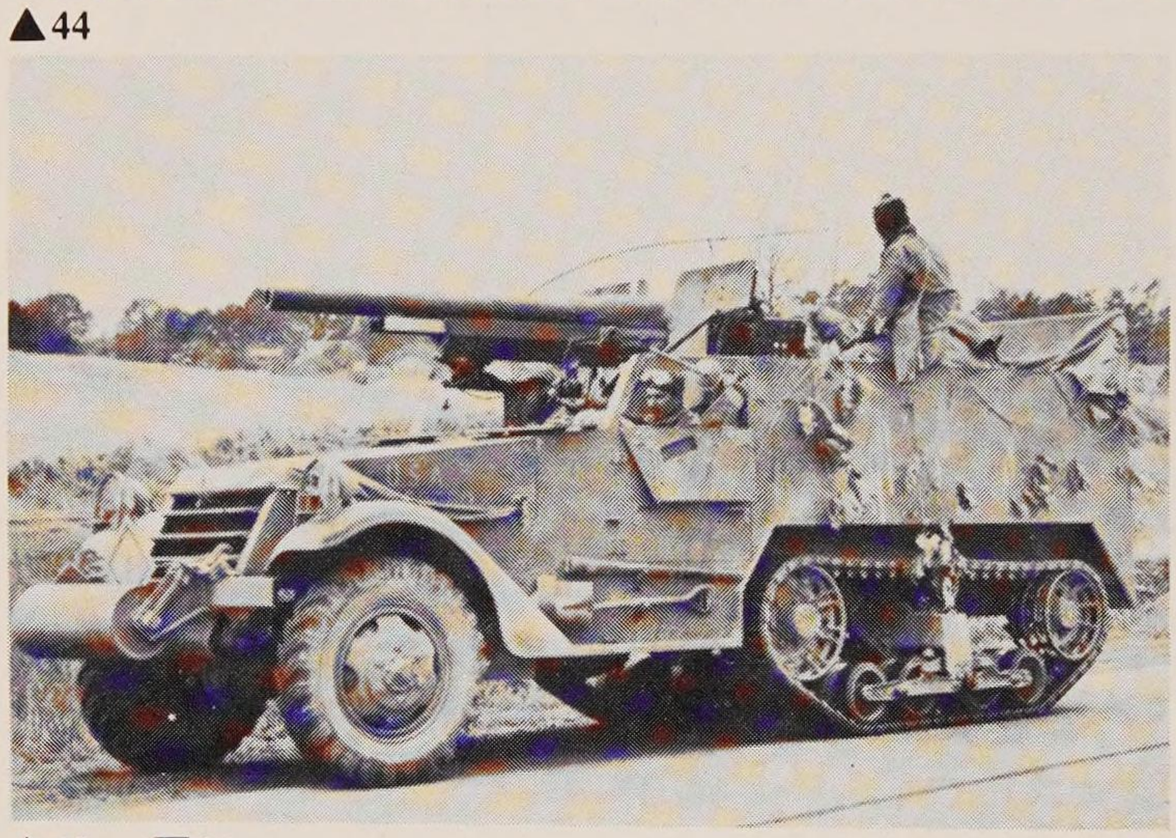

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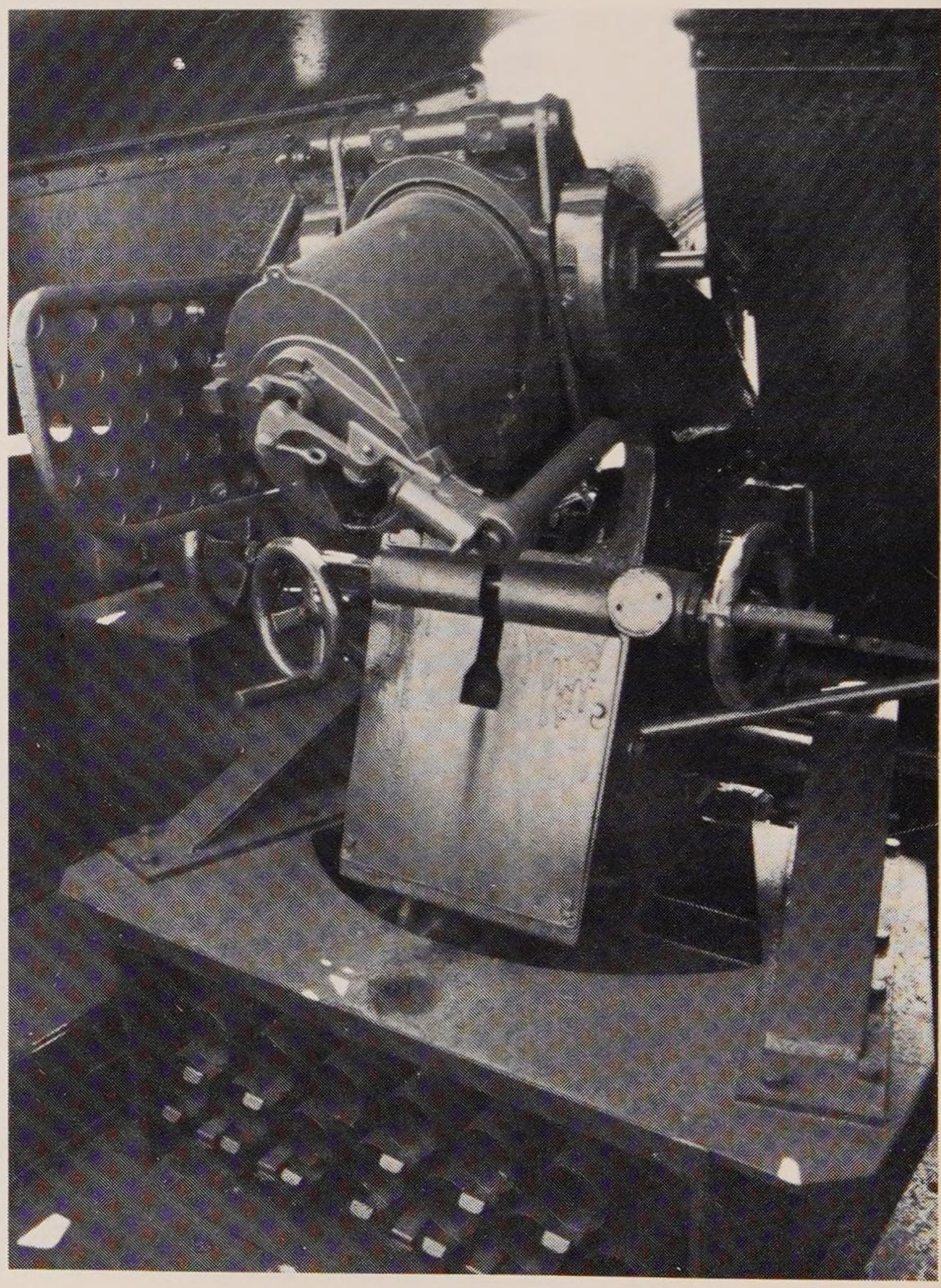


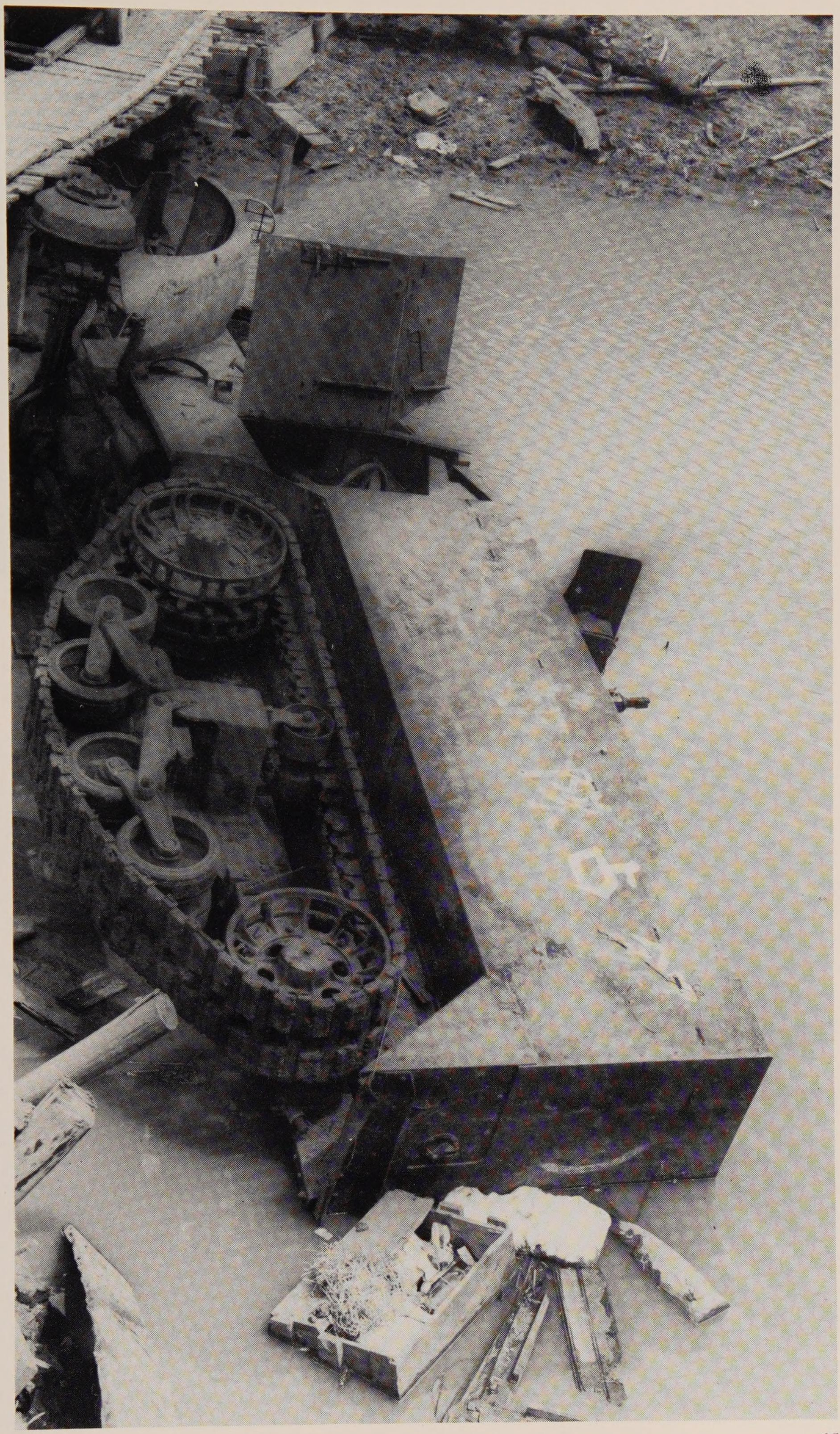
44. There was widespread dissatisfaction with the M6 37mm tank destroyer during the fighting in North Africa, leading some units, like the 41st Armored Infantry, to dismount their 37mm anti-tank guns and remount them on M2 halftracks. This particular vehicle is on exercise in England in April 1944 prior to the Normandy invasion.

45. The initial version of the M3 75mm Gun Motor Carriage (GMC) had the simple flat shield of the normal 75mm field gun. This M3 tank destroyer belonged to D Company, 93rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, in November 1941. These vehicles were originally designated T12.

46. Another T12 of the 93rd Tank Destroyer Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment, during the South Carolina manoeuvres in November 1941. This T12 was assigned to the Blue Army, and carries the B Company metal plate insignia on the front bumper.

47. A close-up photograph of the breech and ammunition stowage of the M3 75 mm GMC. The gun on this vehicle was a modernized derivative of the French 'soixante-quinze' of First World War vintage.

48. During the fighting in the Philippines in 1944–45, the US Army was surprised to discover that at least one M3 75mm GMC had been impressed into service by the Japanese 2nd Armoured Division. After it was knocked out by US forces, it was pushed off a bridge it was blocking.



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49. The standard production version of the M3 75mm tank destroyer had an enlarged shield to give the crew better protection. This is one of the vehicles which was sent to North Africa in 1942.

50. The M3 75mm GMC saw extensive service in North Africa, but it was often tactically misused as an artillery weapon rather than as a tank destroyer. This example has been camouflaged with patches of grey mud, a scheme more suitable to the North African deserts than the usual olive drab.

51. Although the Marines did not use personnel carrier versions of halftracks very extensively, each division did use them in their Special Weapons Battalions. This M3 75mm GMC is being employed by the 4th Marine Division on Saipan, June 1944.

52. The M3 75mm GMC was used in the British Army as a self-propelled gun rather than a tank destroyer. Here, vehicles of the 23rd Armoured Brigade fire on Mt. St. Angelo, Italy, during the Cassino fighting in February 1944.

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53. A Marine M3 75mm GMC in action during the fighting around the Cape Gloucester airport in January 1944.
54. A 5th Marine Division M3 75mm GMC supporting M4 tanks during the fighting on Iwo Jima in February 1945.
55. An M3 75mm GMC of the Special Weapons Battalion, 2nd Marine Division, during the fighting on Tinian in July 1944. These tank destroyers were often used as 'bunker busters' in the Pacific theatre.
56. One of the least-known American tank destroyers was the T48 57mm GMC, which was built specifically for use by the British Army. However, by the time it entered service, its gun was inadequate, and 650 vehicles were shipped instead to the Soviet Army, where it was called the SU-57. A small number served with the Polish People's Army in 1945, and one remains on display at the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw. (Author)

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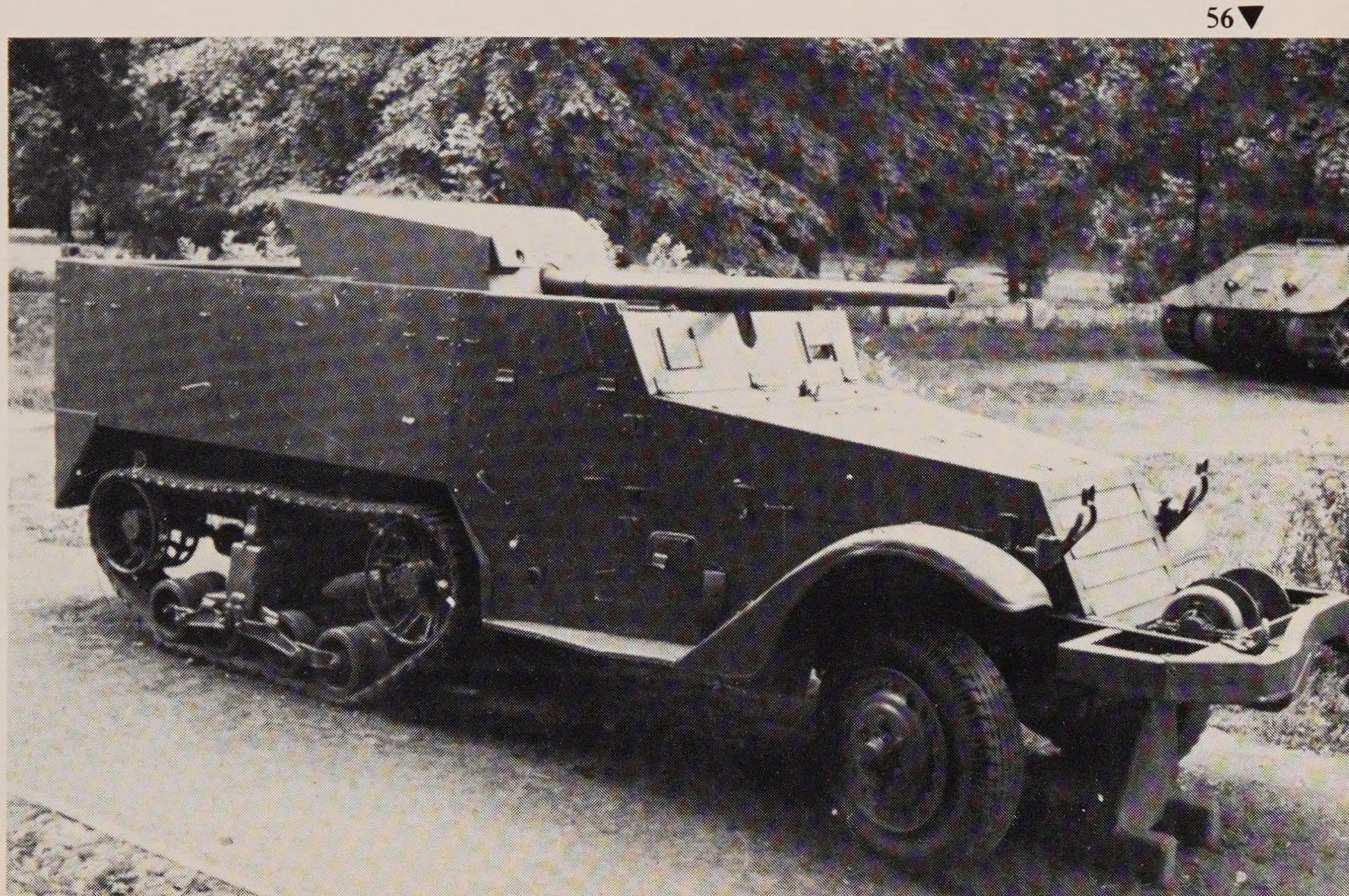

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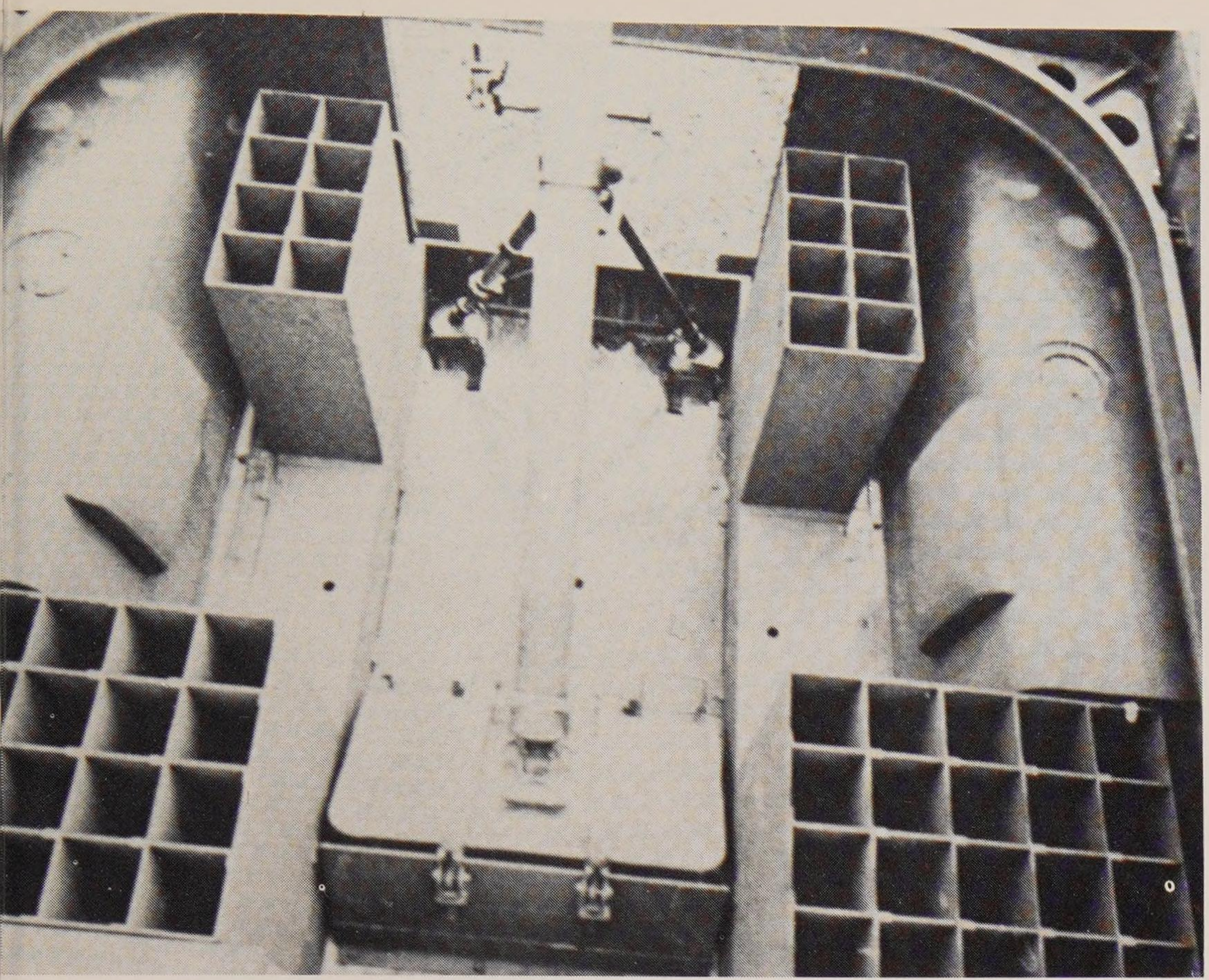

57. An Su-57 of the Soviet Army in Prague in 1945. (I. Bajtos)
58. A close-up of the pintle mount for the 57mm gun of the T48. (Author)
59. The M2 halftrack was converted to accept an 81mm mortar, and this became the M4 Mortar Motor Carriage.
60. Close-up details of the 81mm mortar mount in the M4 MMC.
61. Many units did not care for the rearward-firing configuration of the M4 MMC, and so improvized their own forward-firing arrangements, as shown on this M4 of the 2nd Armored Division.

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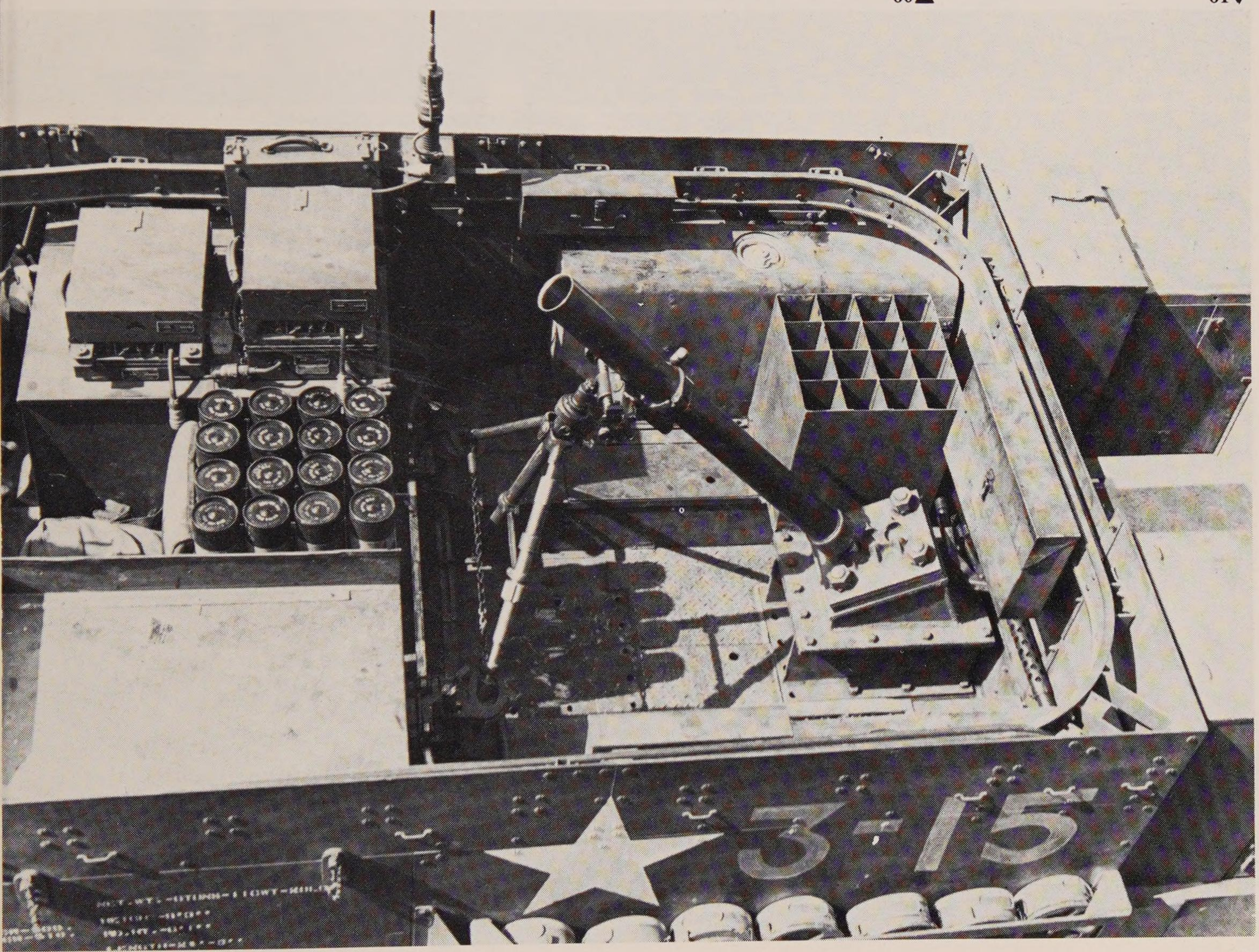

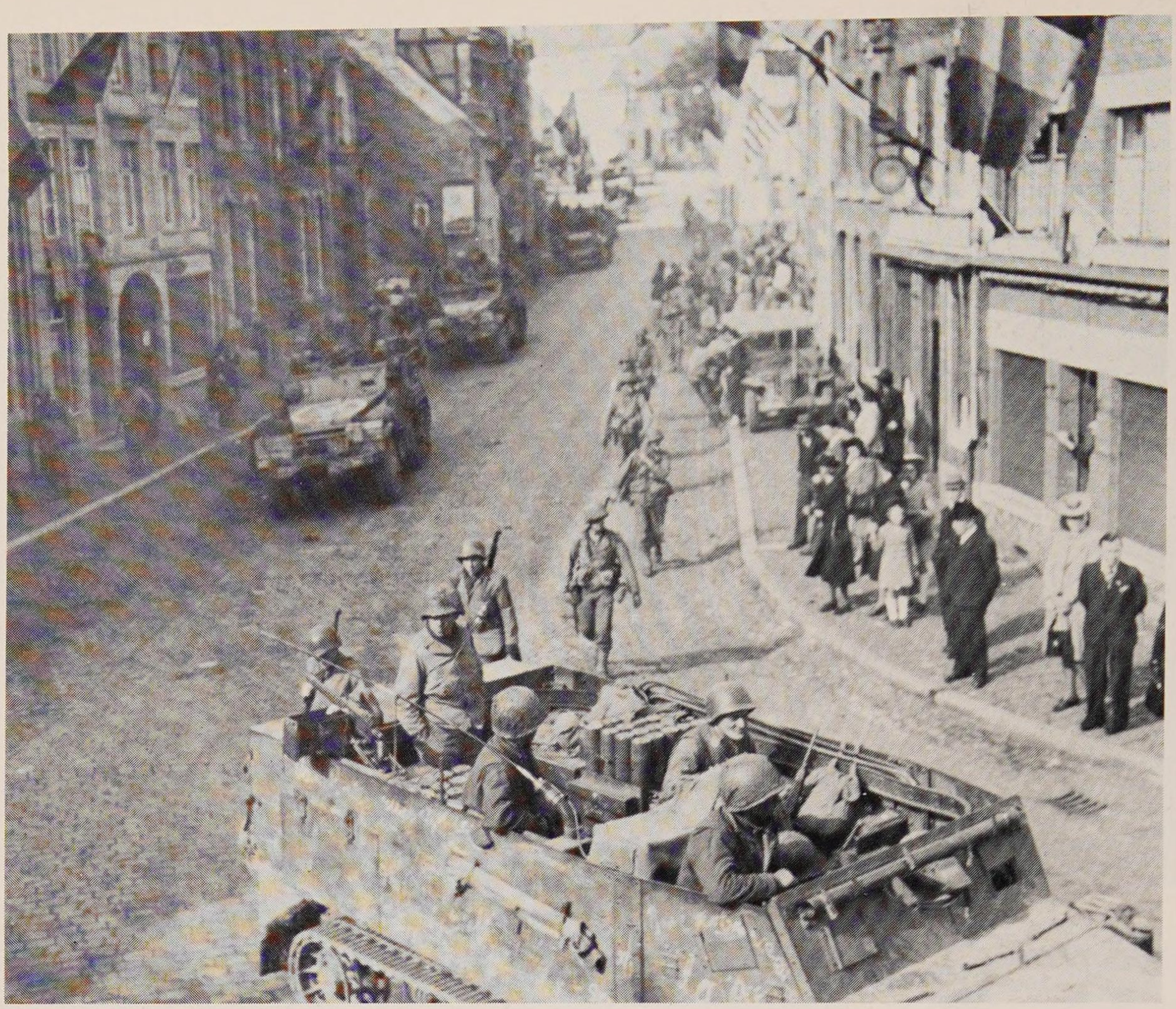

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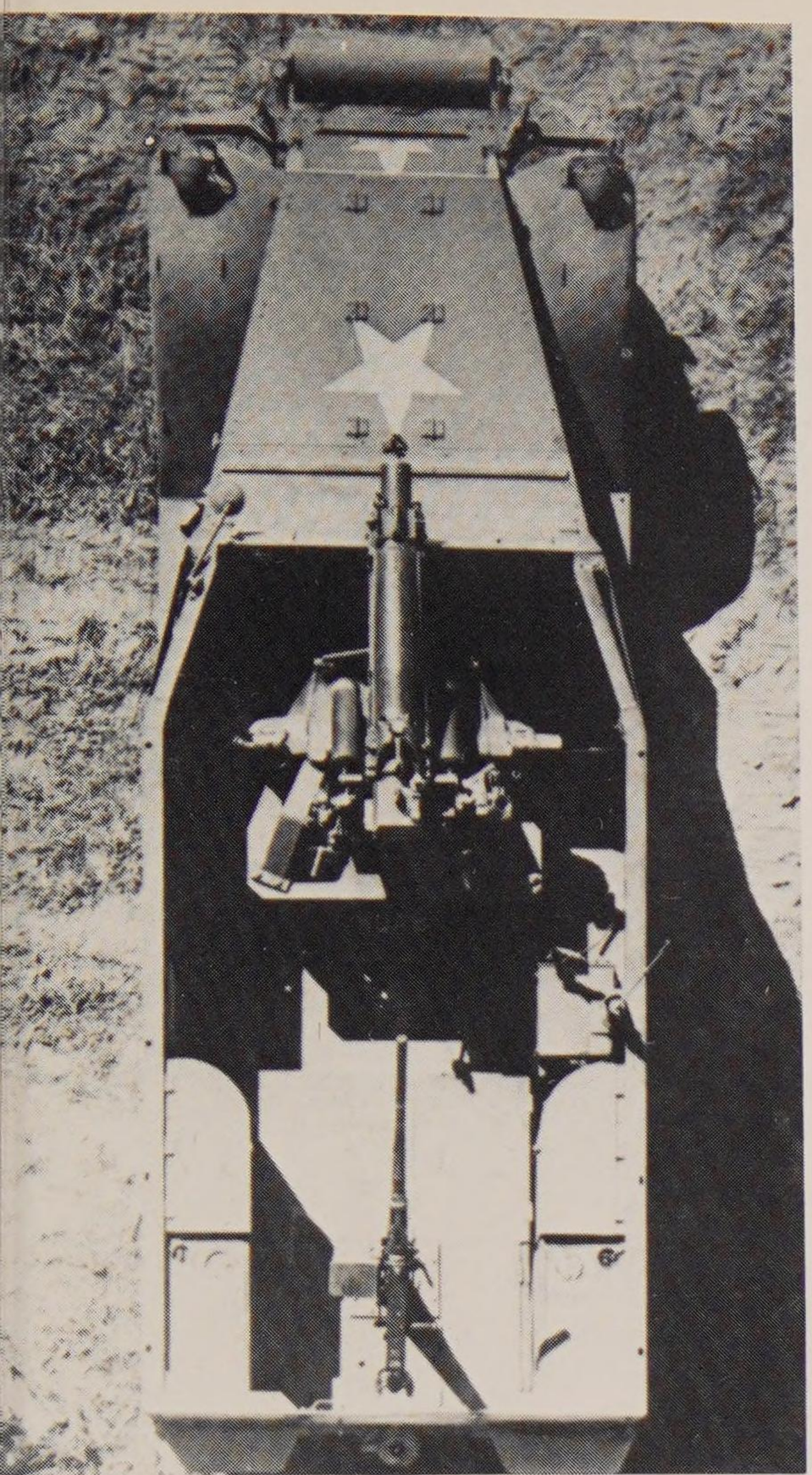
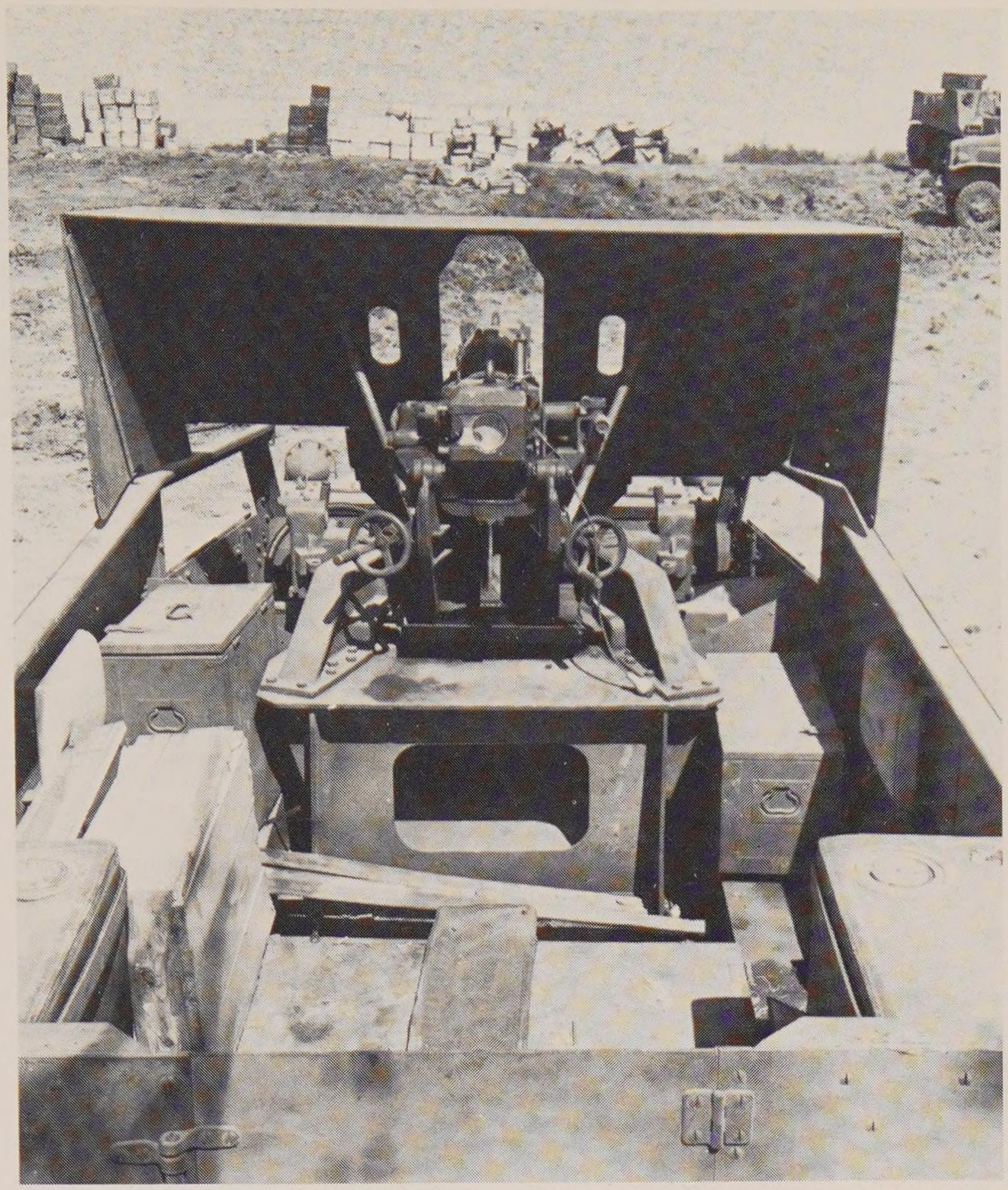
62. An M4 MMC passes through Theux, Belgium, on 10 September 1944.
63. An M4 MMC of the 2nd Armored Division during the fighting in Belgium in January 1945; this photograph shows the forward-firing conversion.
64. The T30 75mm HMC was a combination of the M3 halftrack and the small 75mm pack howitzer. The original version had no shield over the gun.
65. By the time the T30 75mm HMC entered combat, a shield had been added to protect the crew from small-arms fire. This T30 HMC was photographed in Oran in April 1943 after the landings there.
66. A T30 75mm HMC during Army Day celebrations at Fort McPherson, Georgia, in April 1942. This is an early production T30 and lacks the gun shield.





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67. This T30 on exercise in England in March 1943 shows the high splinter shield which was added to protect the gun crew.

68. A T30 comes ashore in North Africa during Operation 'Torch', November 1942. From 1943, the T30 was replaced by the M8 75mm HMC, a vehicle based on the M5 light tank.

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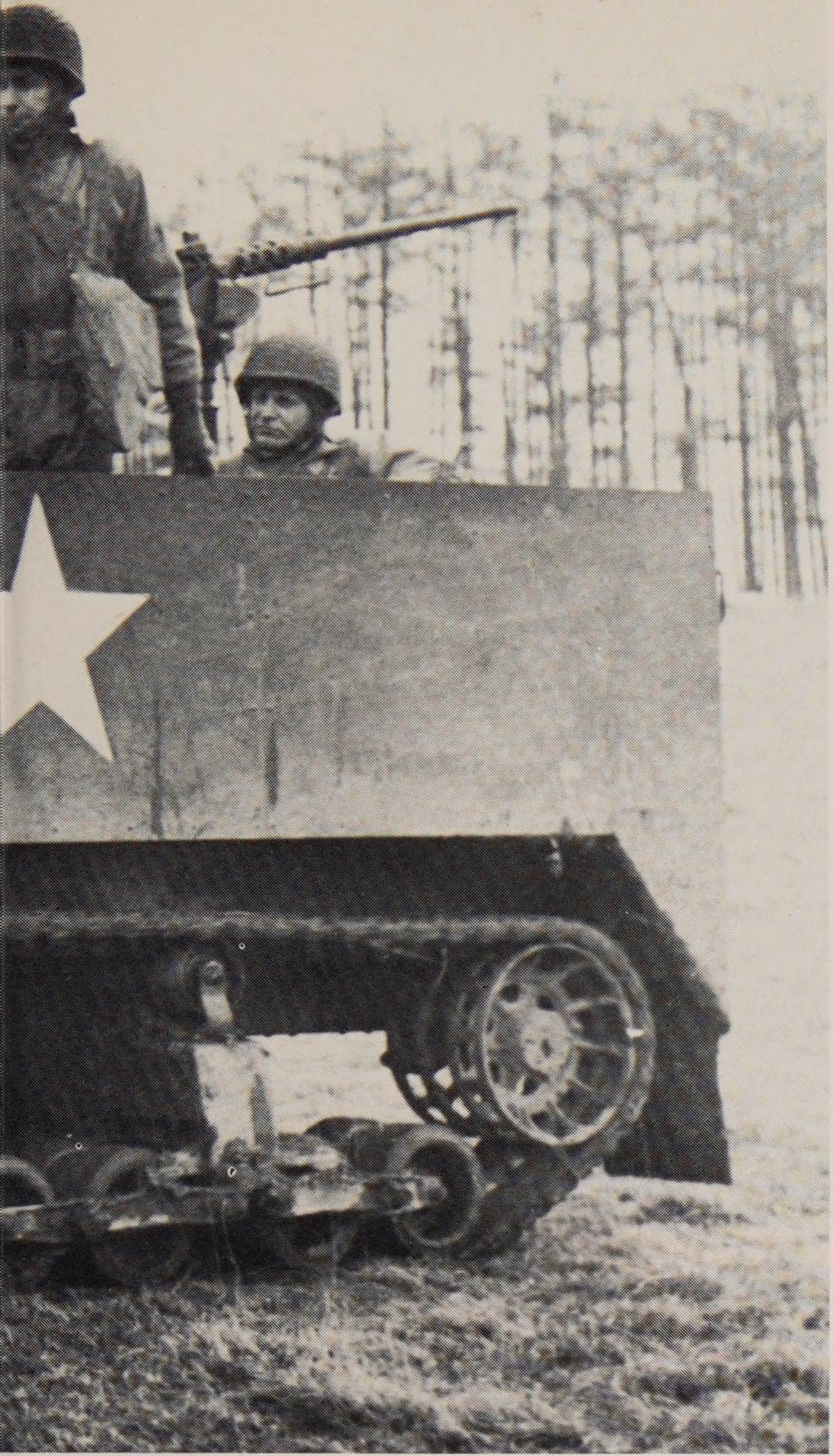
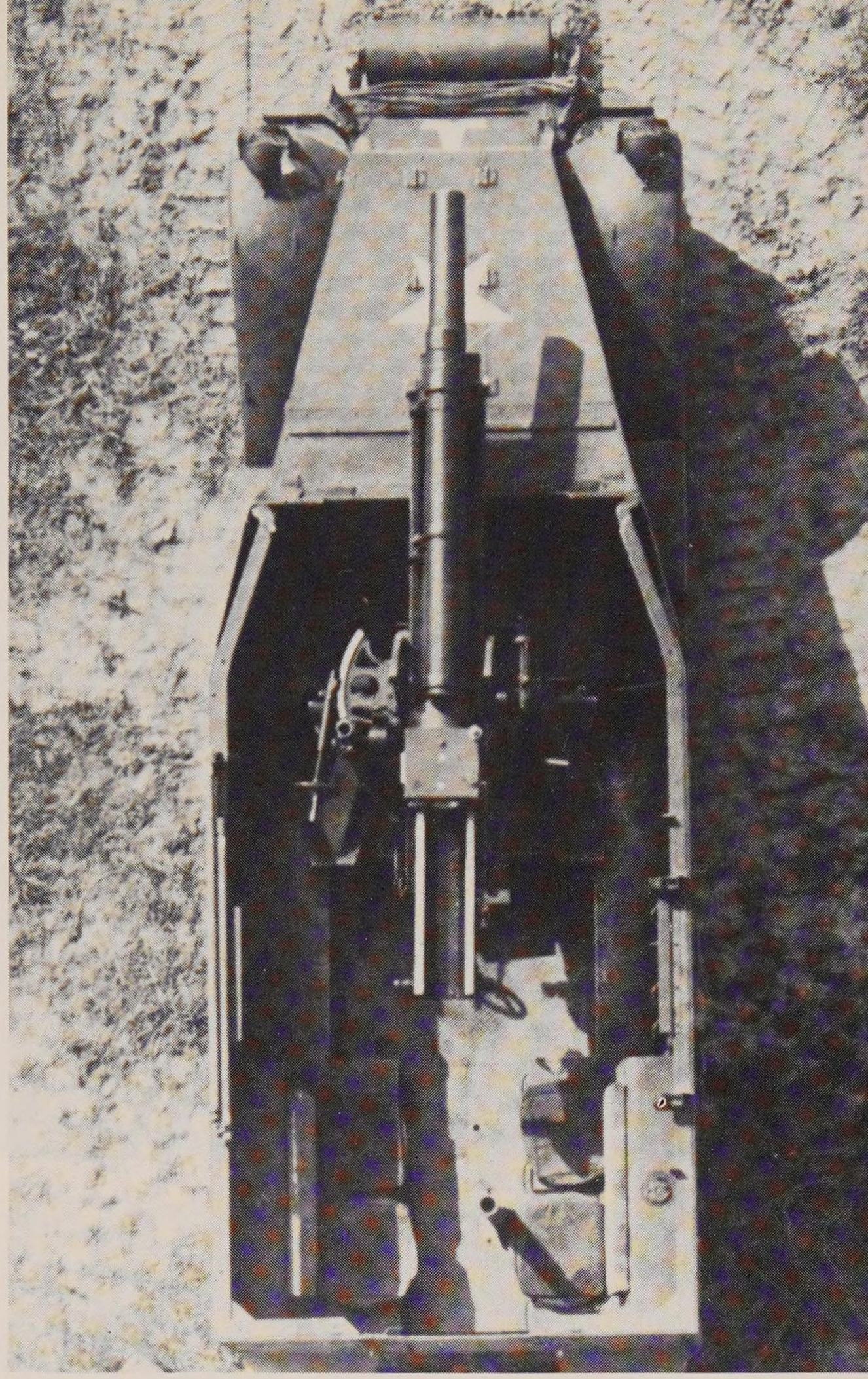
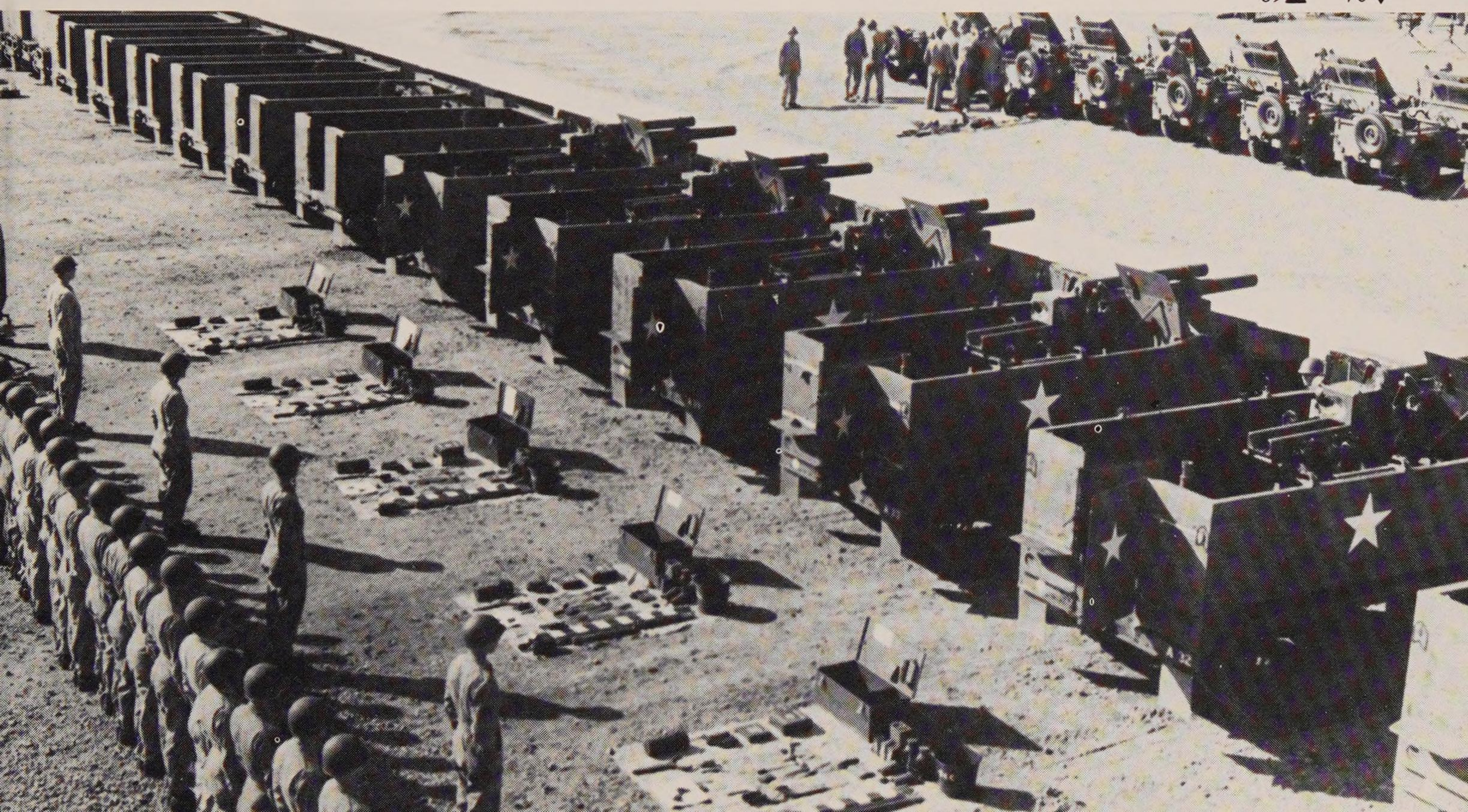
69. The T19 was an extempore Howitzer Motor Carriage mounting a 105mm howitzer on an M3 halftrack.

70. A line-up of T19 105mm HMCs of the 59th Armored Field Artillery Battalion at Camp Chaffee, October 1942.







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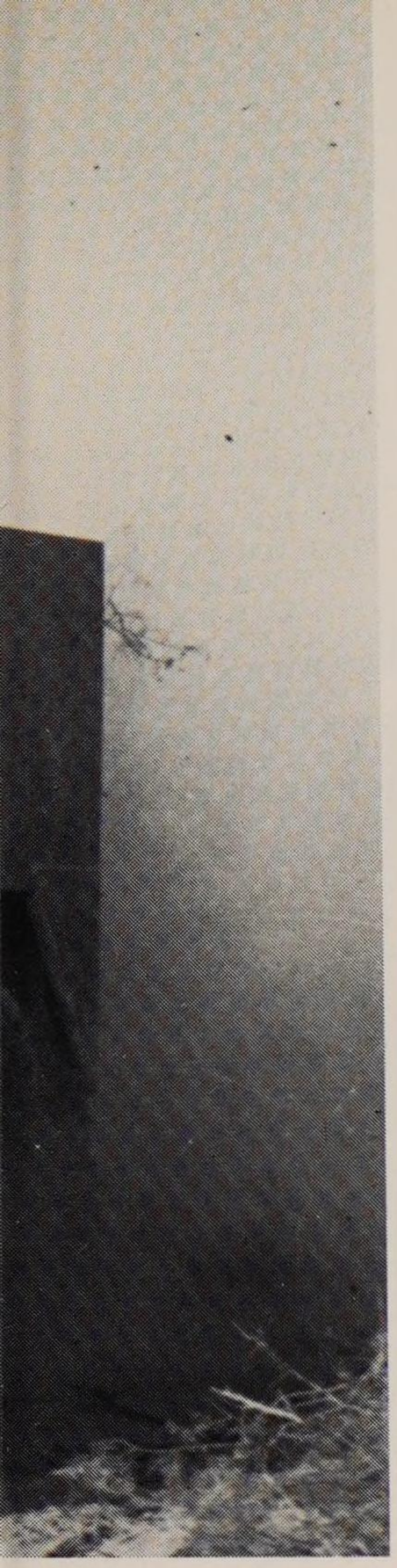

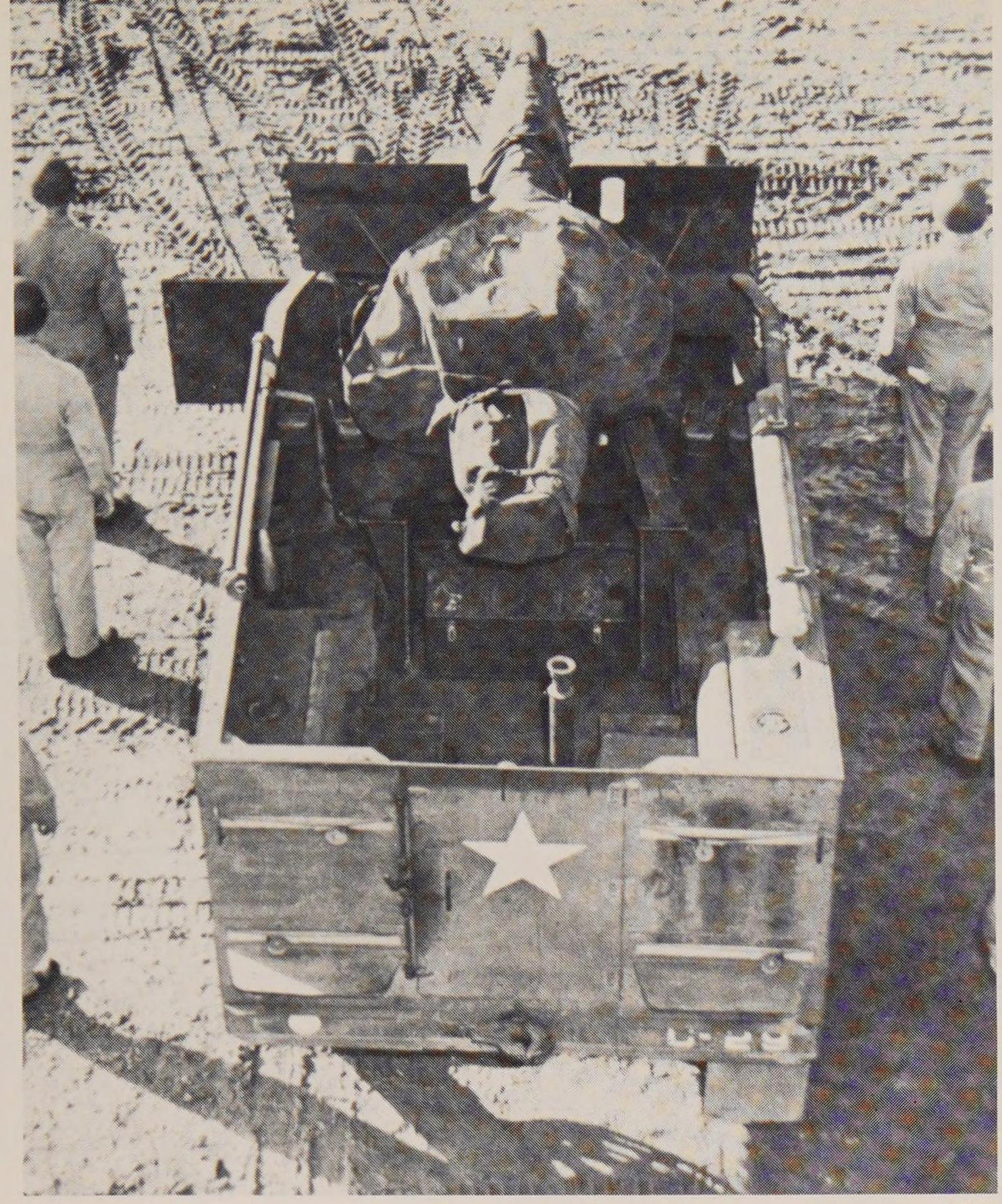

71. Some T19 HMCs were employed without the small gun shields, like this vehicle of the 33rd Armored Regiment on exercise at the Desert Training Center in September 1942.
72. One of the few changes made to the basic M3 halftrack in order to accommodate the 105mm howitzer was a new armour shield for the driver. The shield was hinged at the bottom, as is evident in this view of T19s of the 391st Armored Field Artillery Battalion in 1942.
73. An interesting overhead view of the T19, showing the vehicle's internal arrangements.
74. A spent casing is expelled from the breech of the 105mm howitzer on board a T19 HMC during exercises in Arkansas in October 1942.

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75. T19 HMCs on exercise near Iron Mountain in the Californian desert in 1942.
76. Loading a T19's 105mm howitzer. The howitzer was rather too bulky for the halftrack chassis and, in 1943, the T19 began to be replaced by the M7 105mm HMC, a vehicle based on the M4 tank chassis.
77. A rear view of a T19 which provides details of the interior arrangements. This vehicle belonged to the 59th Armored Field Artillery Battalion based at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas, in October 1942.
78. A T19 HMC being used as an improvized tank destroyer during exercises at the Desert Training Center in California in January 1943.

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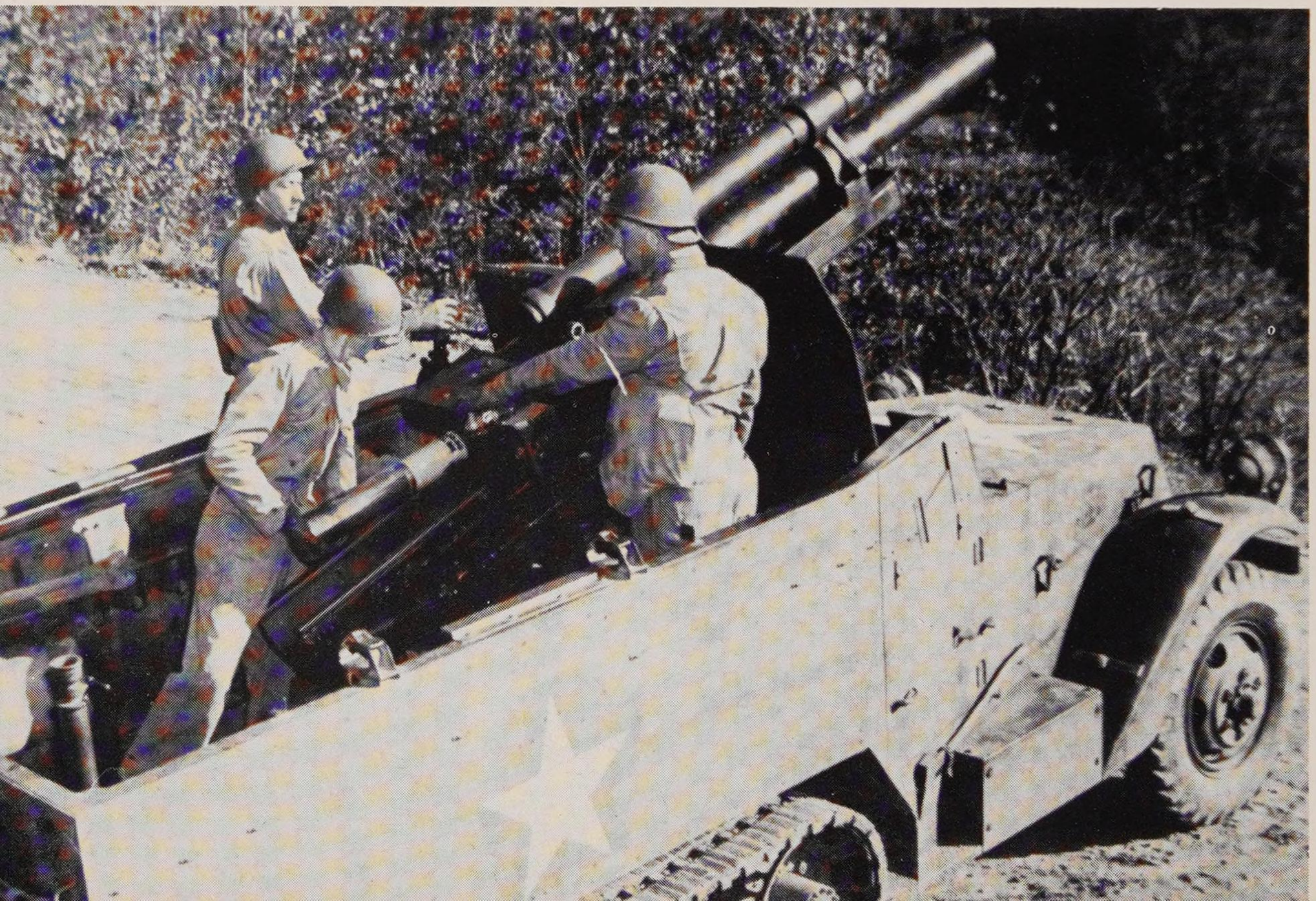

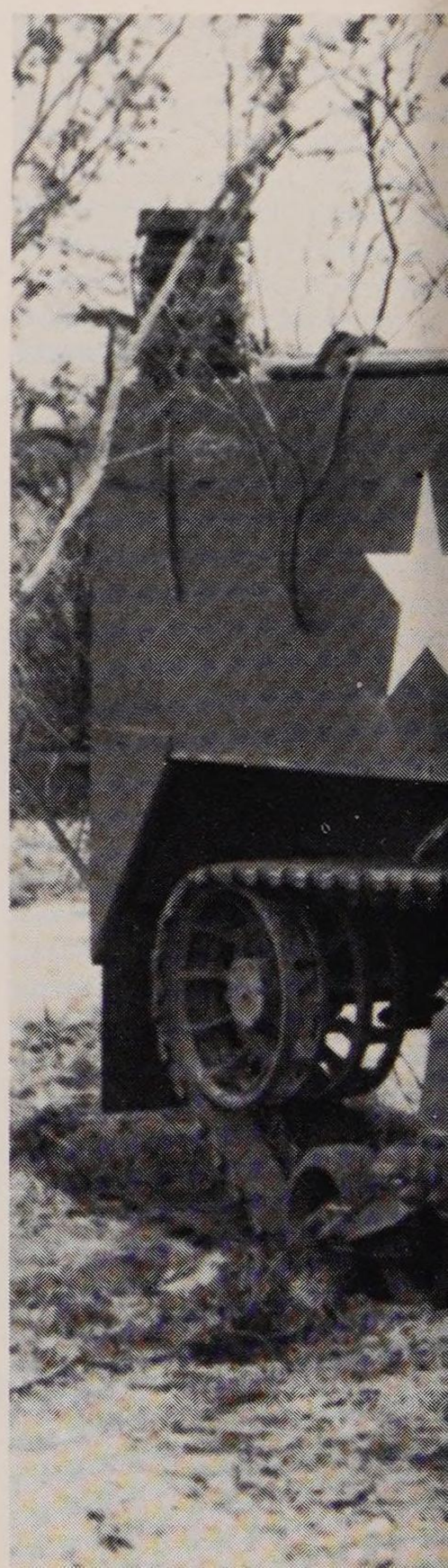

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79. A good detail photograph of the 105mm howitzer mounting on the T19 HMC.
80. Another close-up view of the 105mm howitzer mounting in the T19 HMC, showing the breech in the open position.
81. To supply the T19 with ammunition in the field, a special stripped version of the M3 halftrack was used.
82. T19 HMCs on parade in Rabat, Morocco, in 1942; the vehicles belong to a field artillery battalion of the 2nd Armored Division.

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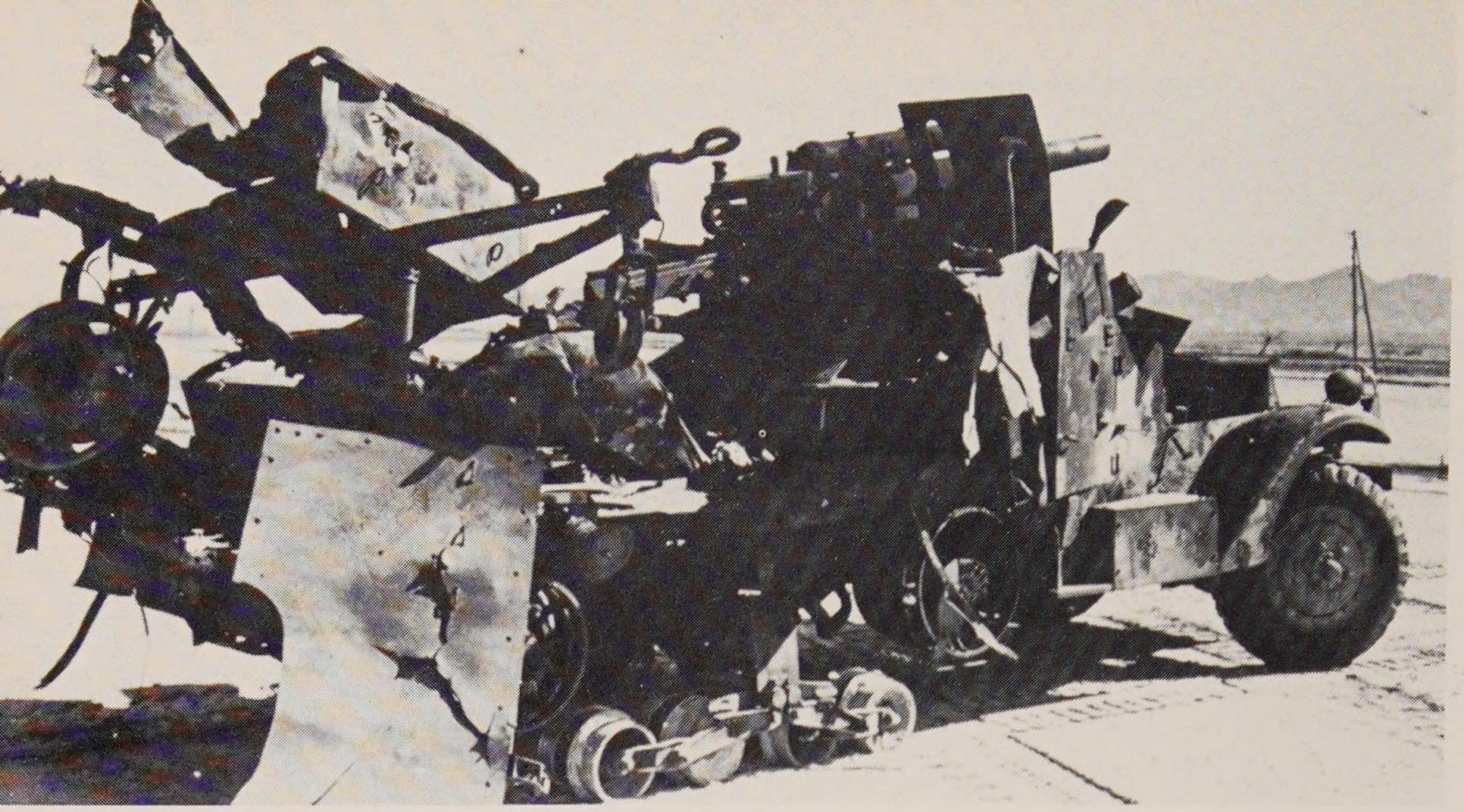

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83. A T19 wrecked during the battle for Sened in Tunisia in 1943. These vehicles offered only modest protection against small arms, and were very vulnerable to artillery fire.
84. The M13 MGMC mounted two .50 calibre machine guns on a Maxson turret. Only a small number saw combat, as it was soon realized that a quadruple mount was more effective. This M13 served with D Battery, 105th AAA Battalion, in the San Pietro area of Italy, 8 January 1944.
85. Although the T19 was obsolete by 1943, at least one battalion fighting in Southern France in August 1944 still had a few on strength.
86. An M13 of C Battery, 441st AAA Battalion, in action outside Anzio in January 1944.

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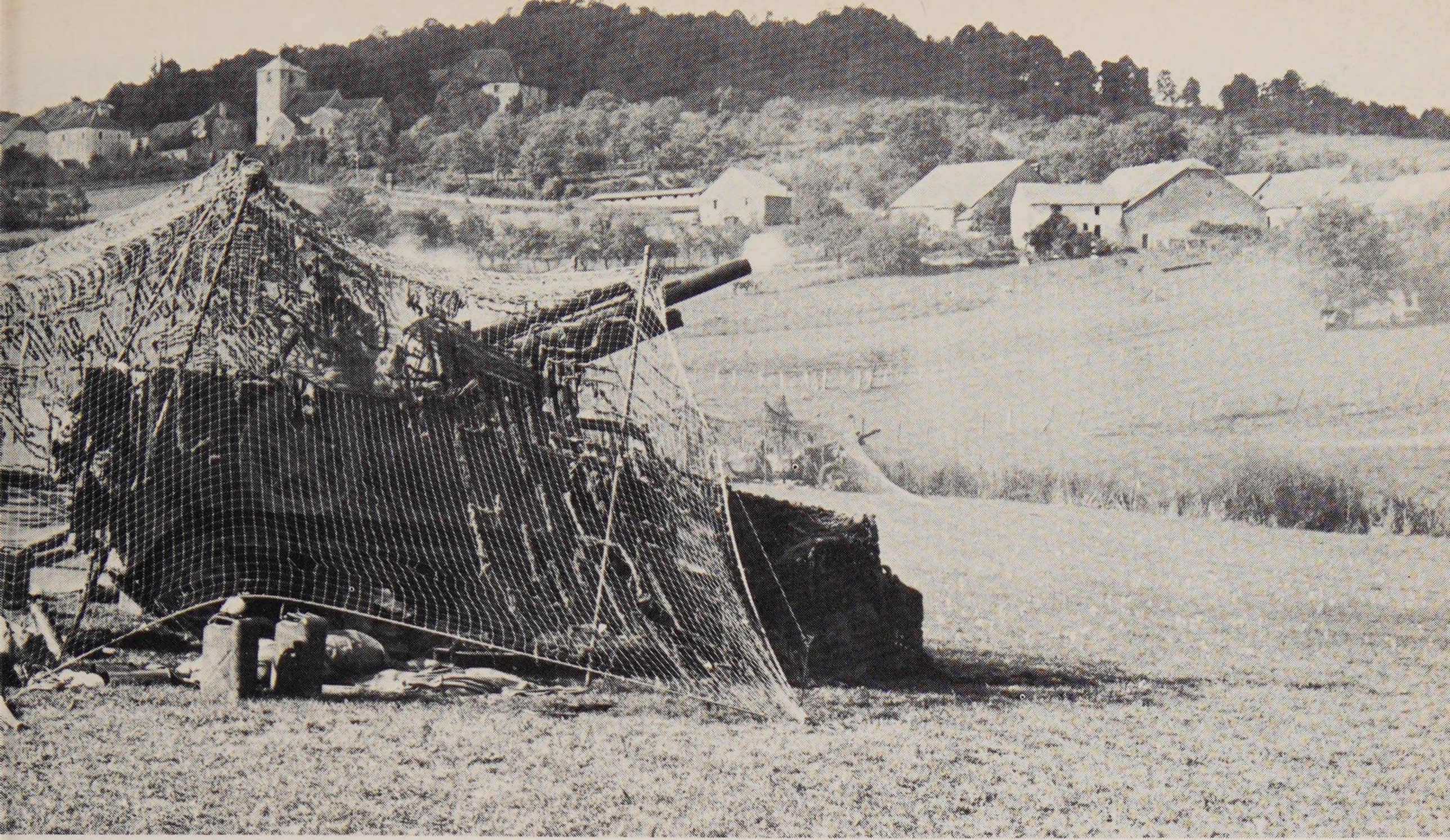

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87. The M16 MGMC was essentially similar to the M13 but had four .50 calibre machine guns; in fact, many M13s were converted to M16s.

88. An M16 of the 377th AAA Battalion in France, 12 July 1944. Lacking air targets, this vehicle proved popular in the ground support role and as such was grimly nicknamed 'The Meat Chopper'.

89. An M16 parked next to an M15 Special of the 209th AAA Battalion. The M15 Special was an improvised ground support halftrack using a 40mm gun instead of the usual 37mm weapon. The 209th AAA saw action in this role along the Villa Verde Trail in the Philippines in 1945.

90. An M16 of the 209th AAA Battalion supporting tanks of the 754th Tank Battalion in the Philippines, July 1945.

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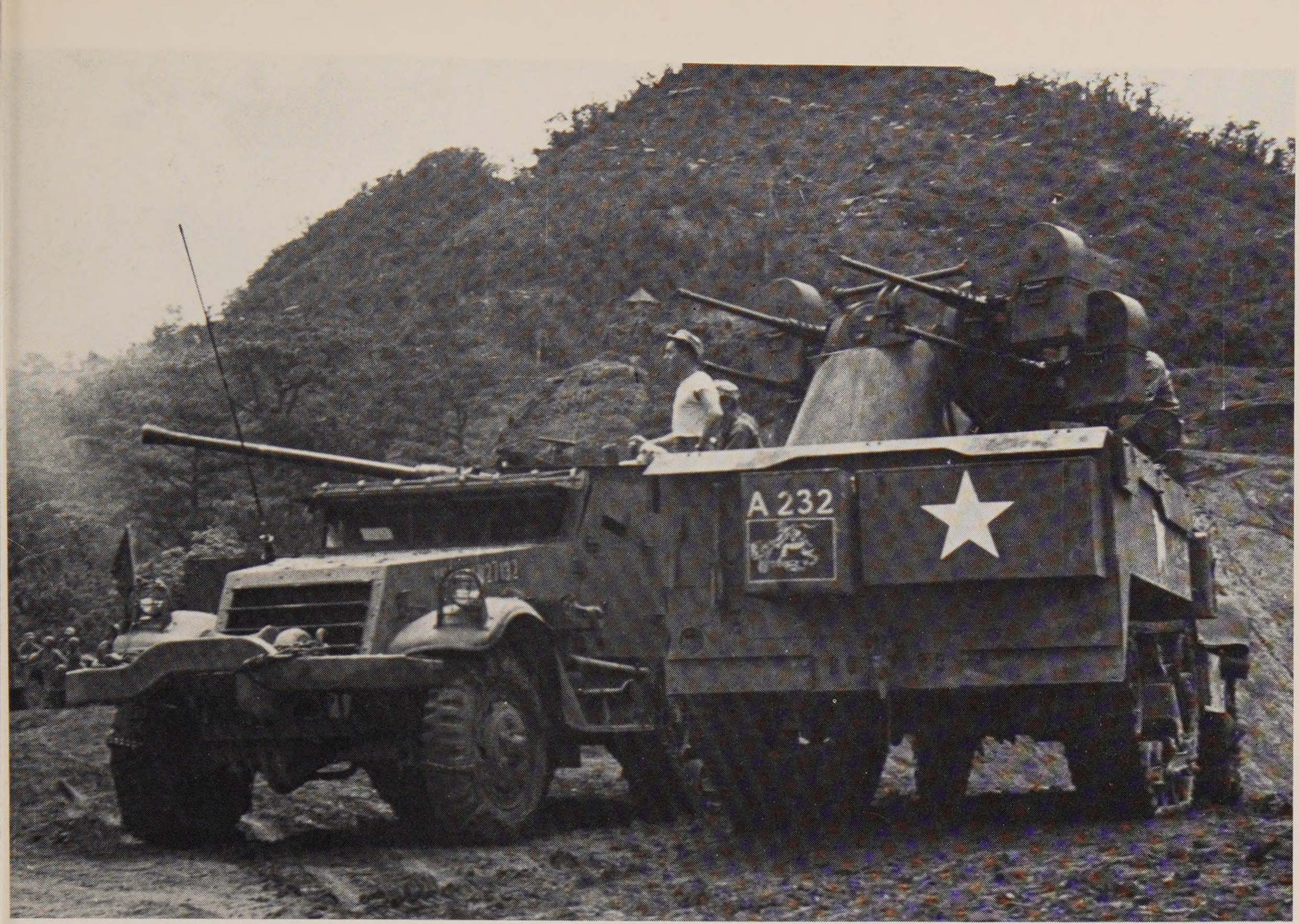

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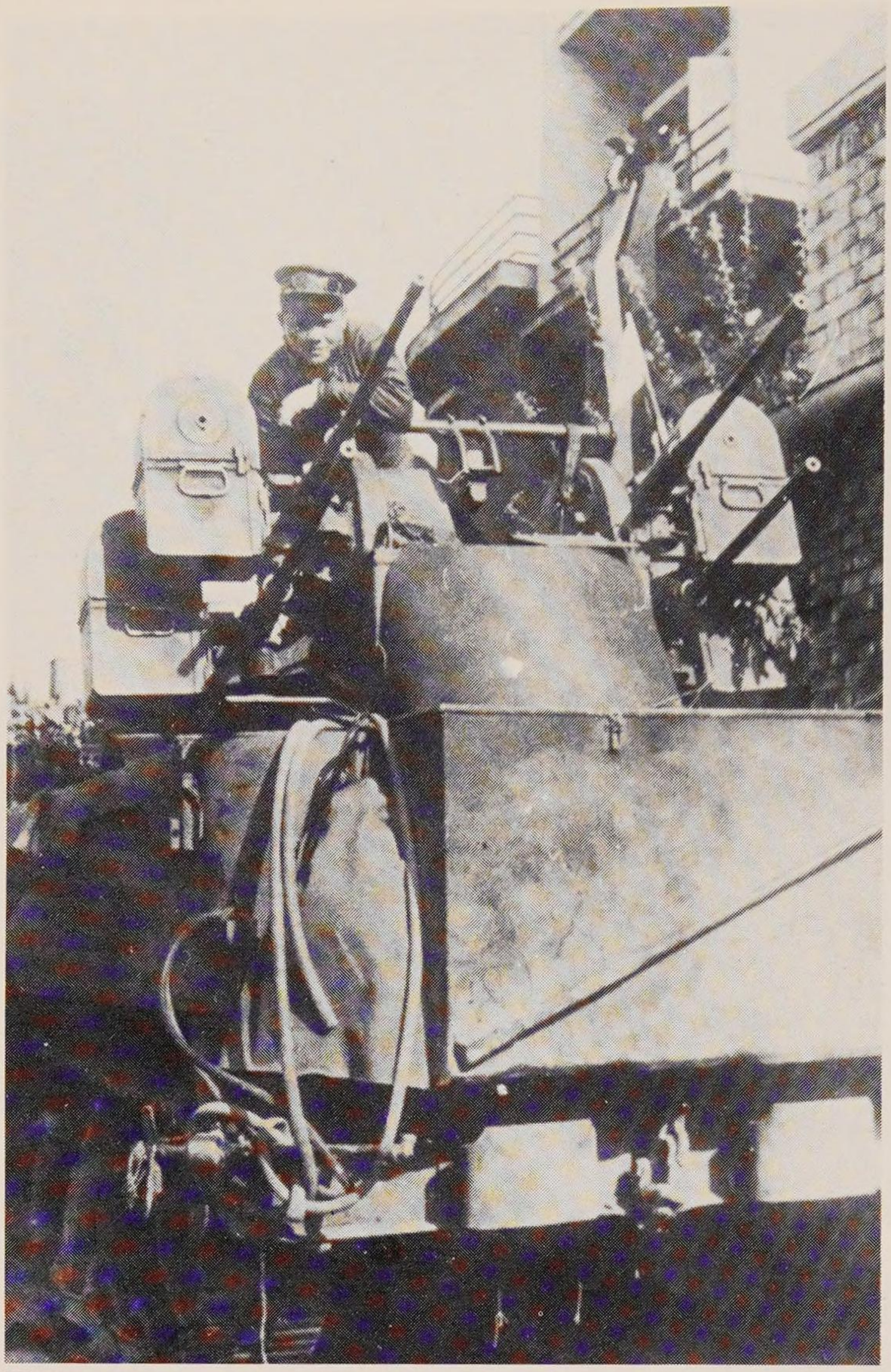

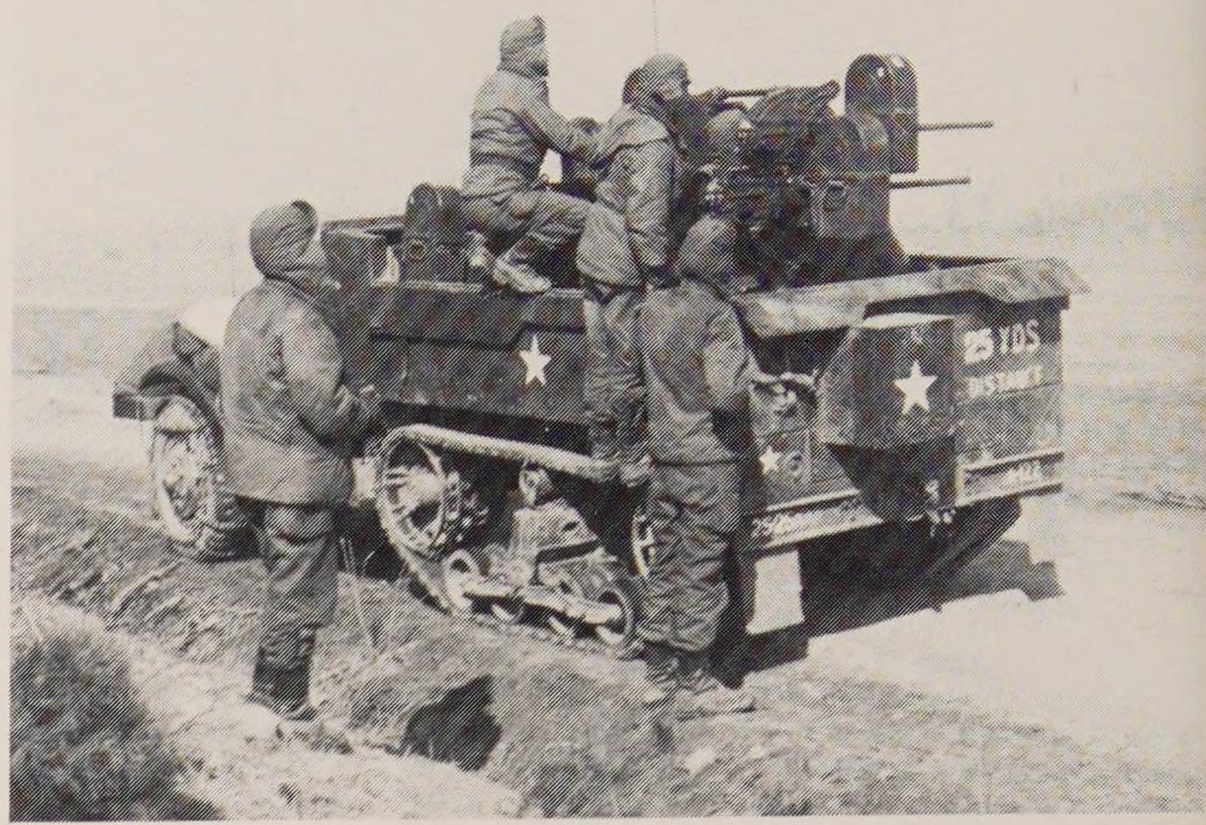

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91. The M17 MGMC was a direct counterpart of the M16, based on the M5 halftrack instead of the M3. Most M17s were shipped through Lend-Lease to Allied armies other than the US: this is a Soviet M17 in Czechoslovakia, 1945. (I. Bajtos)

92. The M16 was one of the last types of halftrack to remain in US Army service, the example illustrated serving with the 25th Infantry Division in Korea in February 1951. In Korea, these vehicles were highly effective in repulsing 'human wave' charges, and were thus very popular with their crews.

93. An M16 of the 92nd AAA Battalion, 1st Cavalry Regiment, in Korea in December 1950.

94. A T28 prototype on trials. This vehicle does not have its machine guns fitted, and sports a curious insulating wrapper on the 37mm gun barrel.

95. The first anti-aircraft version of the M3 halftrack was the T28, which mounted a 37mm gun and two .50 calibre machine guns. This prototype was photographed in November 1942.

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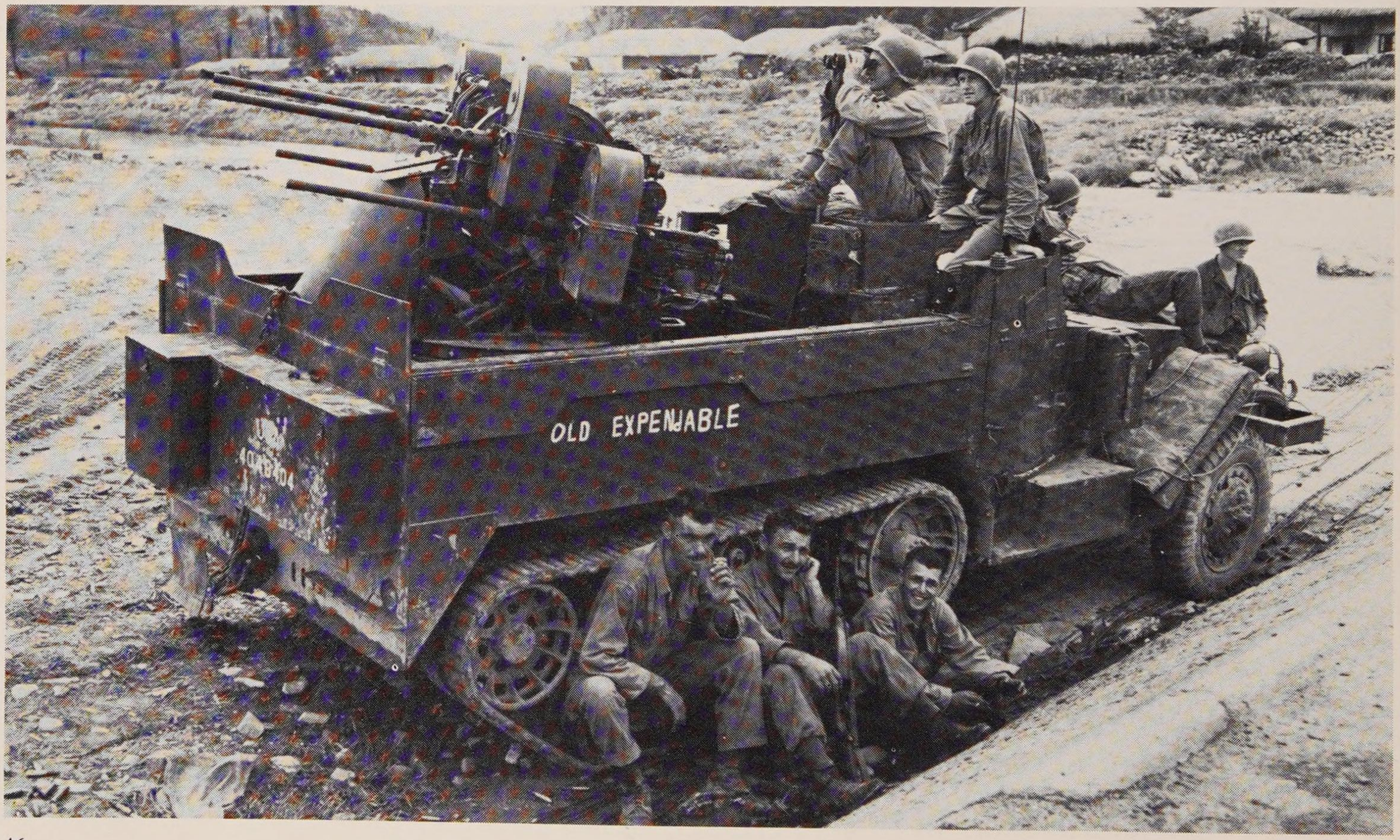

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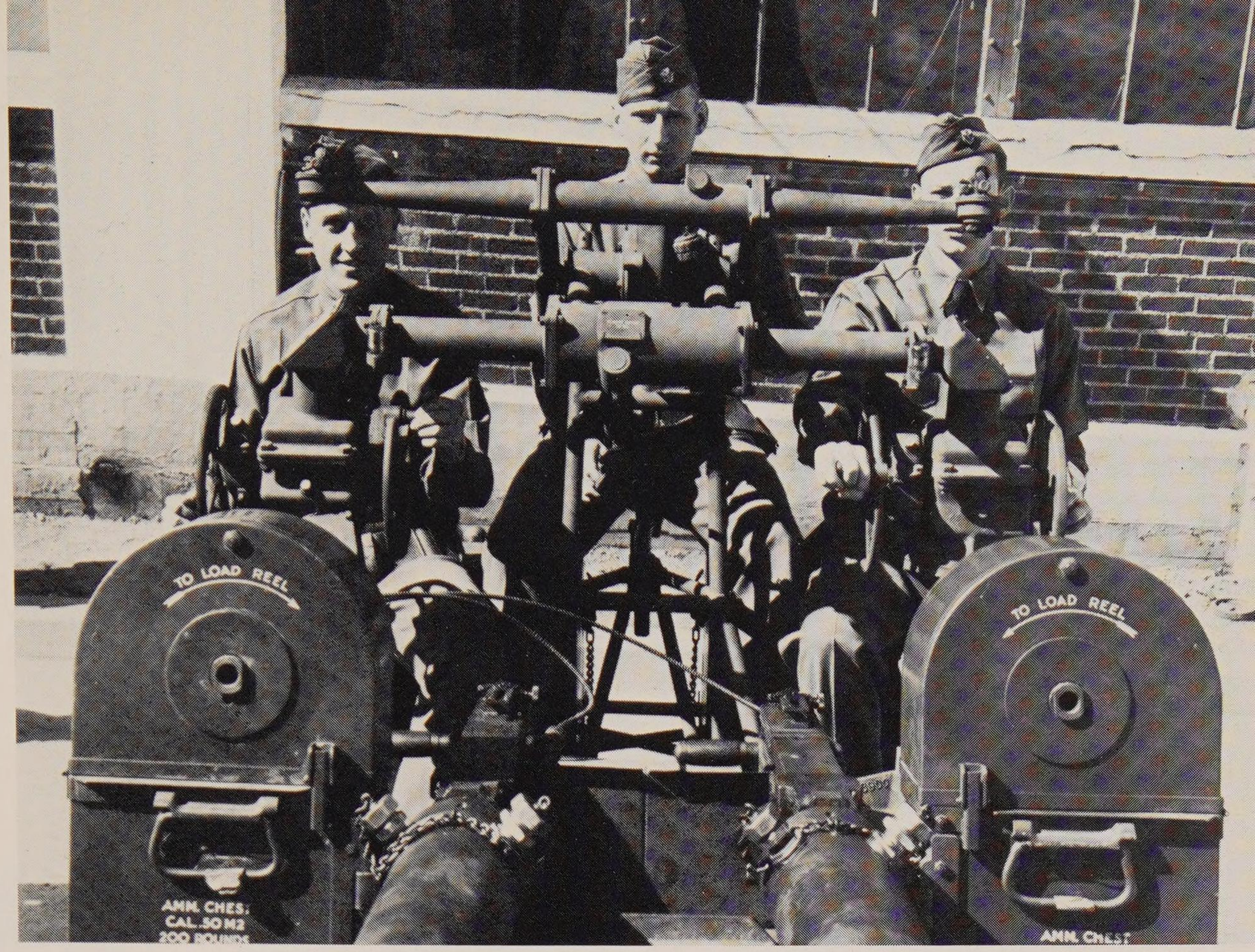
96. The T28 was originally fitted with water-cooled .50 calibre Browning heavy machine guns.
97. One of the 80 T28E1s hastily built for service in North Africa. The T28 proved to be very effective in that theatre, shooting down 78 German aircraft in a three-month period.
98. A close-up photograph showing the fire controls on the T28.
99. The T28's fuel tank was relocated behind the driver's bulkhead, along with additional .50 calibre machine gun ammunition stowage.



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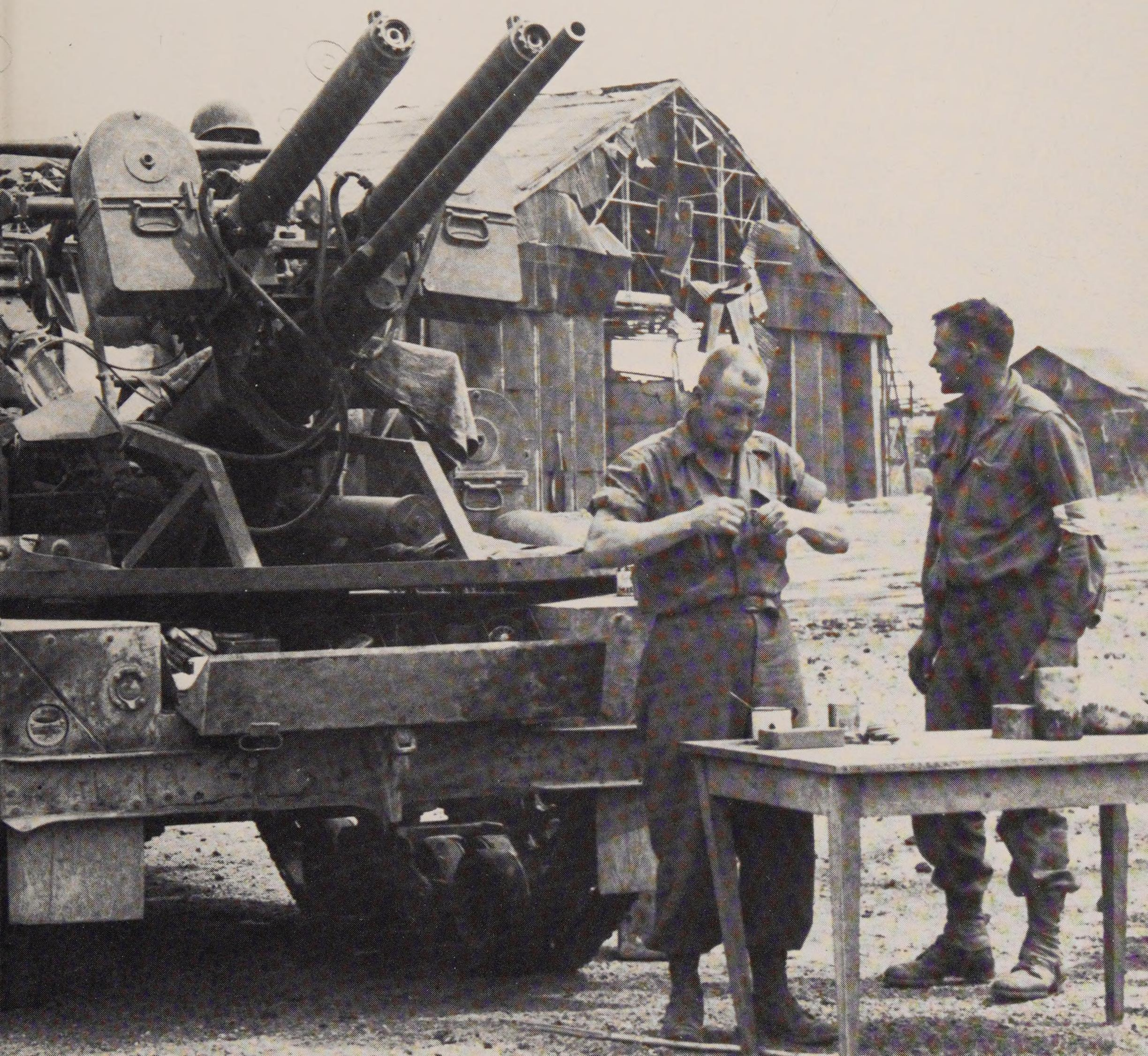
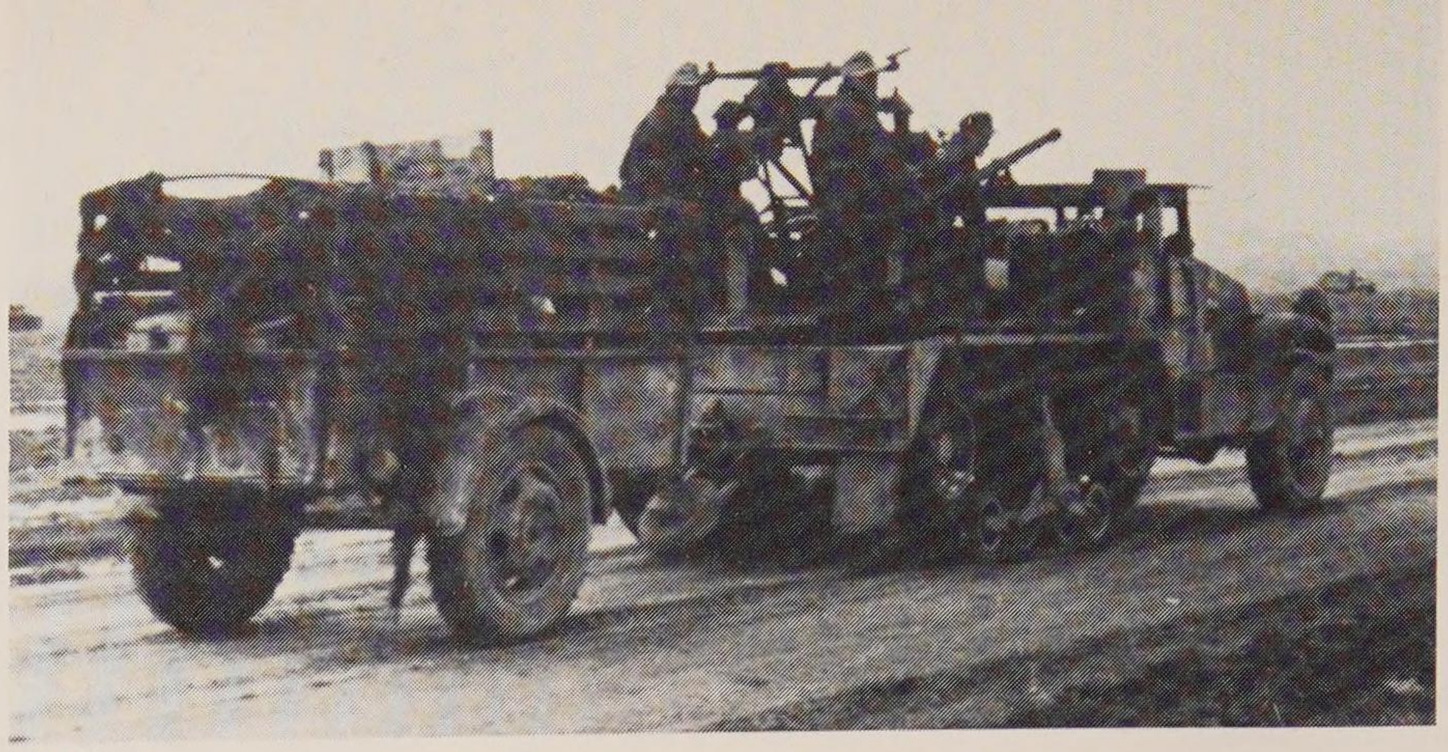
100. A T28E1 near Frejus in southern France, 17 August 1944. By this time, most units had had their T28s replaced by the improved M15.



101. At least one T28E1 was captured by the Afrika Korps and impressed into German service.
102. A T28E1 being loaded on to an LCI near Bizerte for the invasion of Sicily in 1943.
103. An overhead view of the interior of the turret of a prototype T28 with gun shields.
104. A T28E1 of the 433rd AAA Battalion in action in the Venafro sector of the Italian front, November 1943. Note the six aircraft kill markings.
105. Several T28s were experimentally fitted with armour shields to protect the crew, a modification which eventually resulted in the M15 MGMC.



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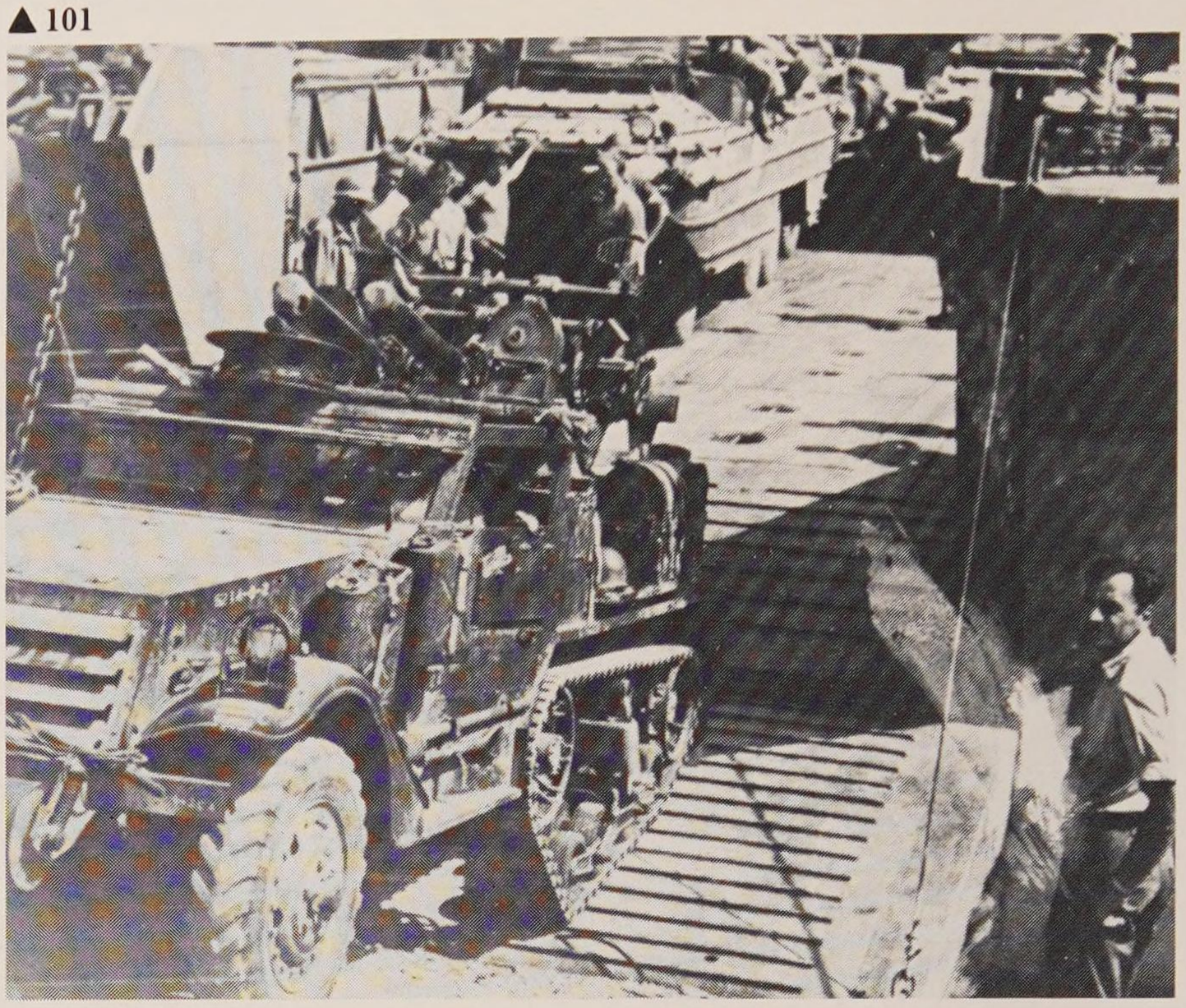

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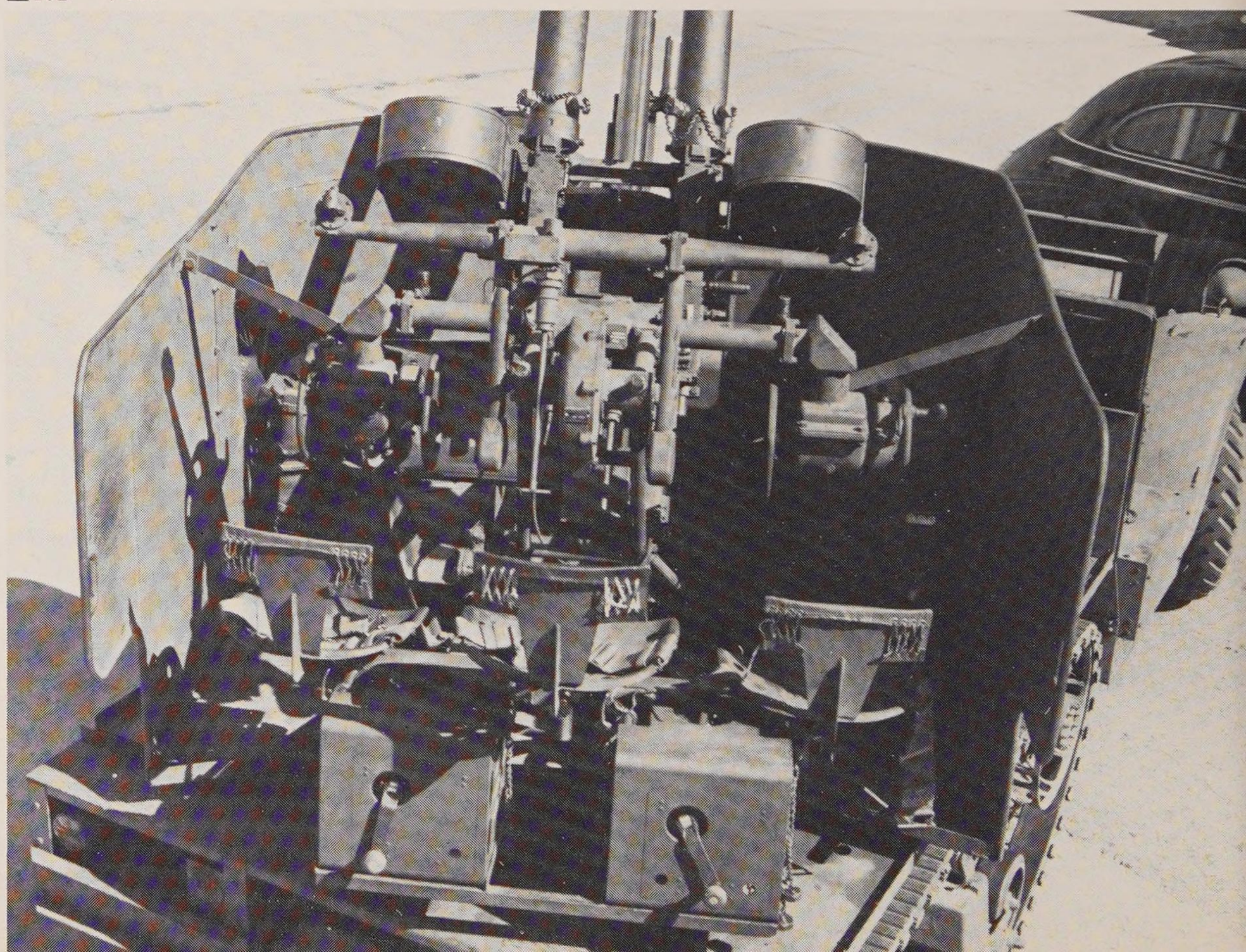

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106. Another view of the prototype T28 with gun shields during a demonstration in Washington in October 1941.
107. The M15 entered service in 1943, and differed from the T28E1 in having a shielded turret and air-cooled .50 calibre machine guns. This photograph shows an M15 of the 434th AAA Battalion in the Capua sector, Italy, November 1943.

108. An M15 of the 105th AAA Battalion in action near San Pietro, Italy, on 3 January 1944.
109. Another 105th AAA Battalion M15, on 8 January 1944 near San Pietro, Italy. The M15 usually towed an ammunition trailer carrying extra 37mm rounds.

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110. An M15 disembarks in southern France on 15 August 1944. Note the 13 aircraft kills registered on the side stowage bin, presumably scored in Italy.

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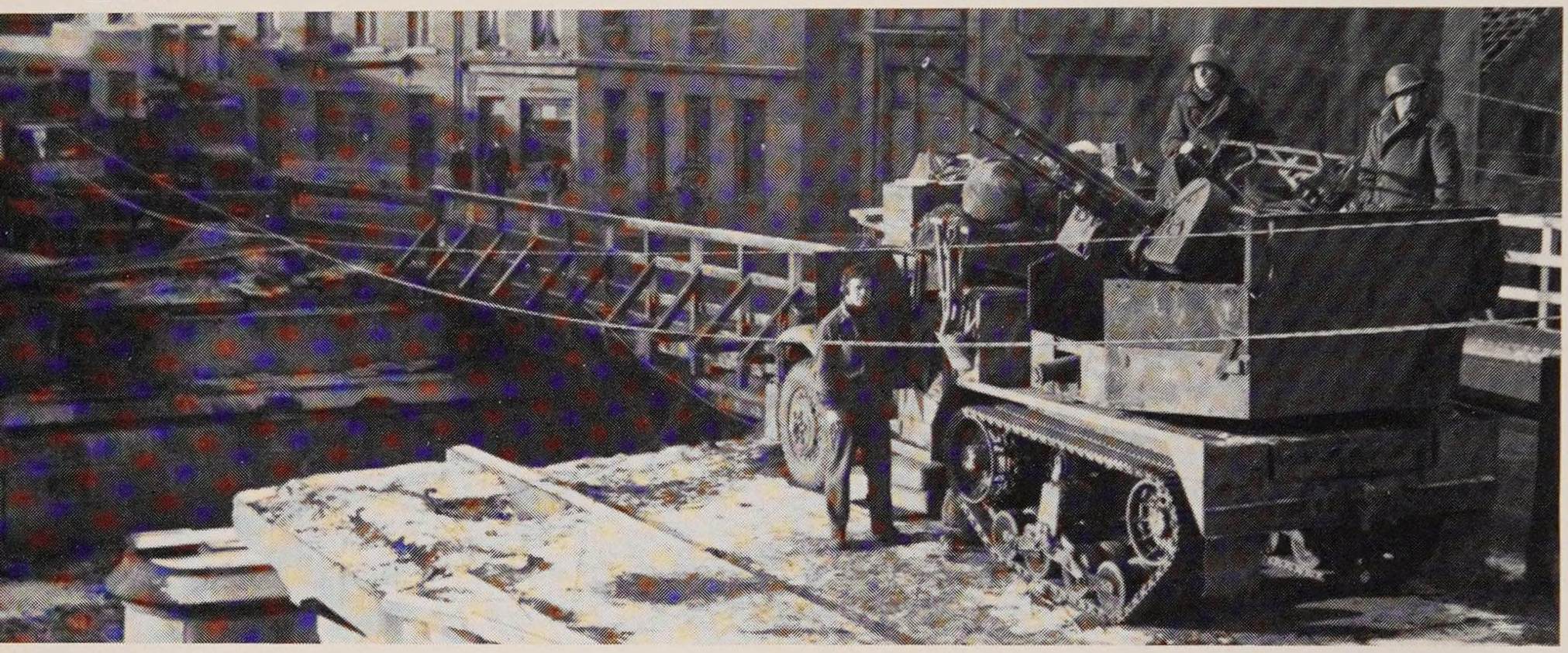

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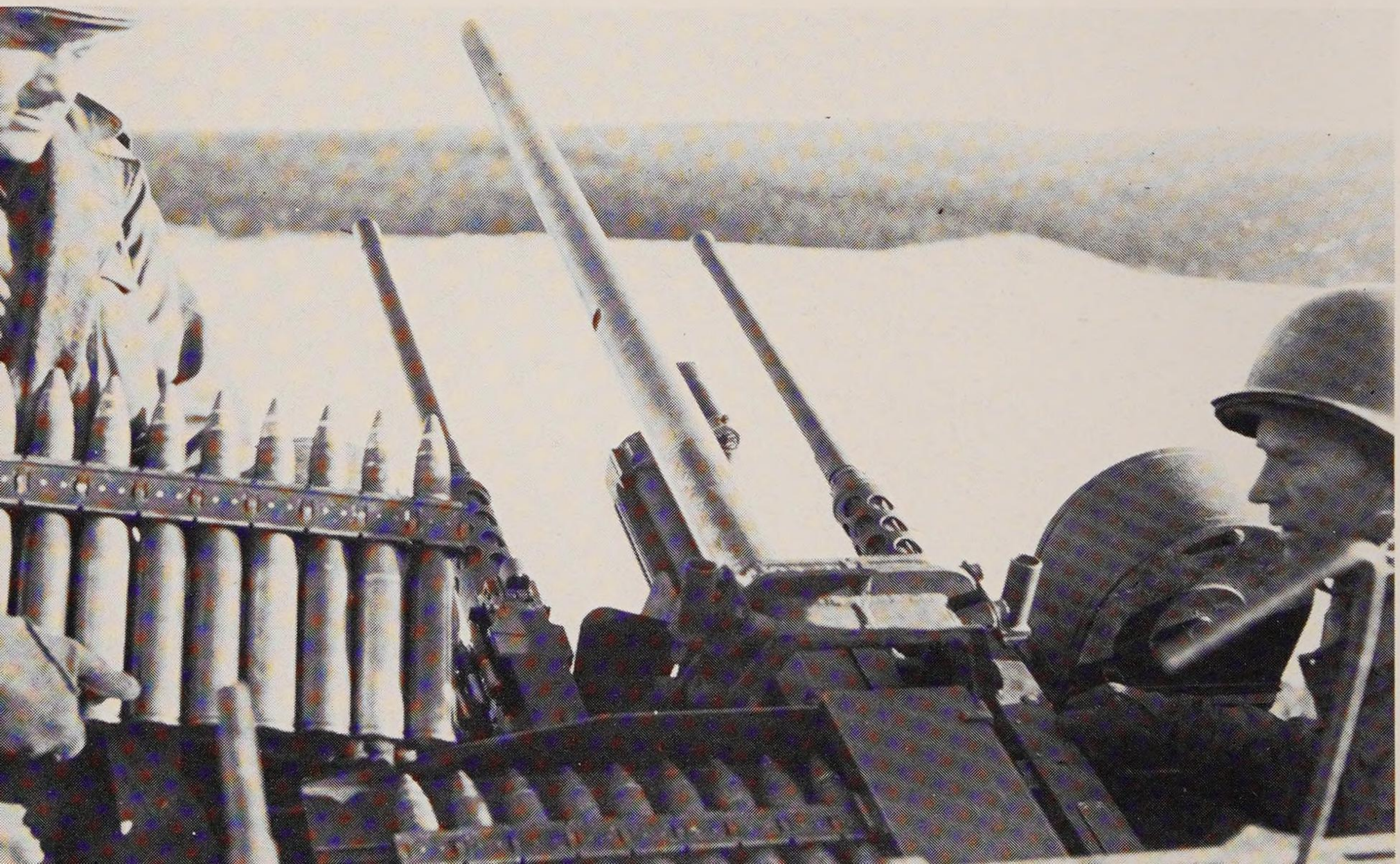

111. The M15A1 had improved fire control and a new gun mounting, with the .50 calibre machine guns below the 37mm gun, rather than above the gun as on the M15.

112. An M15A1 guards a bridge in Limbourg, Belgium, on 29 December 1944. This vehicle belonged to Battery D, 197th AAA Battalion.

113. A close-up view of the ammunition feed system of an M15A1 MGMC of the 571st AAA Battalion.

114. An M15A1 of the 467th AAA Battalion protects a bridge over the River Meuse near Sedan, 27 December 1944.

115. An M15A1 MGMC of the 14th Armored Division passes through Mertzwiller, France, on 20 January 1945.

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116. An M15A1 of the 834th AAA Battalion at Machinato, Okinawa, on 12 June 1945.
117. An M15A1 MGMC crew chats with local French women near Chateau Thierry, 31 August 1944.
118. The crew of an M15A1 of the 390th AAA Battalion scan for targets while on duty near Hoeville, France, 3 November 1944.
119. A close-up photograph of the turret of an M15A1. Many crews removed the canvas cover at the rear as it was then easier to resupply the ammunition bins in the turret.

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120. The crew of an M15A1 of the 834th AAA Battalion on Okinawa look for targets near the Youtan airfield in June 1945.
121. The M15 Special – an M3 halftrack converted to carry a 40mm gun instead of the 37mm found on the basic M15 – was used by the 209th AAA Battalion in the Philippines. M15 Specials were refurbished in Japan after the war, and saw action in Korea.
122. In Korea, the M15A1 was generally used for ground fire support rather than AA protection, as there were so few enemy aircraft after the first few months of fighting. This vehicle, of the 25th Infantry Division, was photographed in August 1950.
123. An M15A1 in action in Korea in July 1950.

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124. After the Second World War the Argentine Army converted some M3 halftracks into howitzer motor carriages. (Just Probst)
125. One of the main impediments to the M3's longevity was the short lifespan of its rubber tracks. In Colombia, where spare parts were a problem, the track assembly was removed and replaced by an ordinary truck axle. A 106mm recoilless rifle was added for further firepower, and this conversion served in the Colombian Army into the 1970s. (James Loop)

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ARMS AND ARMOUR PRESS

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ISBN 0-85368-697-1

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